

# Janita's Dower

OLIVIA·LOVELL·WILSON





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# JANITA'S DOWER



BY

OLIVIA LOVELL WILSON

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## NOTE.

In writing the following narrative, I have used at the request of his great nephew the memoirs of John Sidney Willoughby.

It had been the wish of his uncle that the manuscript should be used, when Time, the great consoler, had placed the narration beyond the power of bringing distressing memories to any surviving soul.

Up to a short time ago the old house still stood in Flatbush, and a relative visiting with me the scene gave me the story of the spiritualistic revelation regarding the treasure hidden in the great cellar. The legends of the Axtell House can be authenticated by reference to any early history of Flatbush. Many didactic portions of Col. Willoughby's manuscript have been purposely omitted as the story speaks so strongly for itself. I beg to state, however, that the narrative thus abridged meets with the approval of his nephew and heir.

OLIVIA LOVELL WILSON.











# JANITA'S DOWER.

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## CHAPTER I.

"A child of our grandmother Eve, a female ; or for thy more sweet understanding, a woman."

LOVE'S LABOR LOST.

I HAD spoken harshly as was my wont when deeply moved, and Susy turned on me one swift glance of reproach. Then, with chin uplifted, stood tapping four dainty fingers upon the window pane and gazed out into the gathering twilight.

In truth Susy was pouting, but as the slave of her merest whim, I must admit that it was the most delectable pout ever witnessed.

Could you have seen her as she stood thus, you would not have doubted me, although a lover's statement is apt to be given over to hyperbole. The softest of creamy skins, with the color in her cheek like the Bonseline roses that bloomed in my aunt's garden. Hair, not the red-gold which artists admire, nor the ordinary blonde, but soft mellow masses, coiled about a shapely head. Eyes earnest and gray and usually full of a peaceful happy light, but clouded now by love's



reproach. A charming nose, and a mouth—ah! the limitations of the language preclude my describing Susy's mouth. A delicious ghost of displeasure perched upon her lips now, for which I was responsible.

I had committed treason and I was very miserable. When a youth is nearly twenty-five years of age, and has been betrothed five years, and sees the prospect of matrimony growing ever more dim, it is hard to be teased even a little by the dear object of one's affection.

Susy had laid a hand upon the jangling chords of jealousy within me, and in a torrent of despairing angry words I offered her her freedom. Hence the pout, and tapping finger-tips.

She was loyal and I knew it. Not a drop of blood that flooded my darling's cheeks would play me false, and this knowledge should have staid my foolish words. In the silence I felt the injustice that prompted me to speak to her thus.

"Susy," I began, meekly.

The fingers ceased a moment.

"Well," she said gently.

"You are an angel."

Her fingers took up the very devil's tattoo again as she replied:

"Oh no, I am not, John. Not the least bit of a one. I am a little demon ——"

"Susy, Susy," I urged, reproachfully. "You are only justly angry with me. I am a very rash man, and have already flung aside much happiness. Pity and forgive me, dear."



She looked at me doubtfully a moment, then her sweet gray eyes were dimmed by tears, and I knew I had won the day and only need kiss those bright drops away to have her entire forgiveness.

"Jack," she said, after the necessary reconciliation was effected, and her head was so comfortably close to my coat that the soft cheek brushed the rude fabric. "Jack dear, I have been thinking about our house to-day, our home."

"Well, dear?" I returned as she paused meditatively.

"In the twilight, John, before you come home, we are going to leave the curtains looped back."

"Yes, that I may see the cheery light as I approach the house. And so, Susy, we build our 'Castle in Spain,' " I concluded, with some bitterness. Susy put her hand on my lips and proceeded slowly.

"Yes, our castle in Spain, if you choose to call it so, although I cannot think why you should say Spain. It must be a very unpleasant place to live in. Bull-fights and horrid spiders, and such jealous men," she concluded, with such an aggrieved glance at me, that I laughed a little.

"Love in a cottage then, you dear, ignorant little woman. Your ideas of Spain are evidently not clearly defined. But have you made any change in our domestic arrangements since we last decided that the cottage should have green blinds?"

"Oh yes. I have decided it must be red—deep rich red, to catch the light, so you can see the glow when you approach the house."



"What is to be red, Susy? I confess you perplex me. Not the cottage? and I hope not your dear little face, because I love it just as it looks now, and——"

"Oh, Stupid! don't be foolish. I mean the table-cover, of course, and the lamp in the center."

"And the tea set of silver, which Aunt Mildred will never give us, Susy. There, don't cloud over that sweet face. I know one thing. The dearest, darlingest little wife in all the world will be near that table ready to pour the tea for the most worthless, yet fondest of husbands."

I followed my words with the degree of punctuation lovers always find necessary to round their periods.

"Won't it be nice, Jack?" she cried, her arms about my neck.

"Very, Susy. What you girls term 'lovely.' But it does seem hard to have to grind so right up to Christmas eve. It would have been infinitely wiser on my part not to have quarreled with Aunt Mildred."

"But, Jack, the principle of the thing."

"Humph!" I rejoined grimly. "Principle doesn't help me to any of life's comforts. I fear on my part it was principally stubbornness."

"John, do you really think so?" Susy is grave and earnest.

"Perhaps not that altogether, Susy. I had my reason for not wanting to spoil a good scamp by making a poor preacher. However, it is all over now. Poor old soul, I did love her, better than I thought I did."

"Then, John dear," said Susy resolutely, "go to her



at once, and beg her forgiveness. She loves you still, or she would not be so bitter against you. Your pride and strong will stand between you. Overcome yourself, John, and go to her. Harold can contrive an interview——”

“What? and fall on my knees, crying dramatically, ‘Forgive and forget, I am your child.’ No—no, Susy. She would think me a miserable poverty-stricken youth. Perhaps persuade Harold to show me the door, as a last dose of gall and wormwood. No, sweet, I will never submit to that. Willoughbys neither forgive nor forget hard words. Aunt Mildred has banished me forever. My brother glories in my former estate. I have sold my heritage.”

I spoke with increasing acrimony, and Susy was silent, evidently pained by my tone.

“Harold never glories in his present position. You wrong him. He is distressed to have been chosen in your stead,” she said finally. “Nothing has grieved him like the threatened estrangement between you two who until the last two years have been such devoted brothers. Aunty, too, shows her recognition of your right to rebel against her demand, in that she has never asked Harold to give up his career for that of a theologian.”

“She has profited by one experience, and hesitates to rouse the same blood again,” I replied proudly. “Harold is not a fool to be turned from his course for a woman’s whim. His will is more unbending than mine, but he knows better how to win his way. But



enough, Susy! I must depart. Give me another kiss and look more cheerful. There! I will come early Christmas eve, and help deck the tree for the youngsters." For Susy had some small brothers and sisters, who tormented us outrageously, yet we were weak enough to love them fondly.

"Thank you, John," Susy returned, but detained me. "I wanted to say that—I—told Harold he could come if he would, and help us also Christmas eve. He seemed so pleased. You do not mind? There is no real trouble between you?"

Her eyes, full of pleading, were seeking my evasive glance.

"Where did you see Harold?" I asked, rather coldly.

"He met me last evening as I came from church. He seemed so sad and was so pleased when I asked him to come home with me. John, you *must not* let this question of money arise to make a division between you."

"I have never condemned my brother, Susy, for accepting a good offer, or profiting through my loss. I sold the birthright fairly. There was no advantage taken——"

"John!" There were tears in Susy's tone now, and she drooped her head.

"Ah! Susy, my dear love, look up and never weep over two such undeserving fellow creatures as Harold and John Willoughby. I confess the iron has entered into my soul—but I love the boy too well to give him



over to Aunt Mildred entirely. Does *that* satisfy you?"

"Not entirely," she replied, smiling, however.

"It must until we meet again. Good-by, little peacemaker."

"Promise me one thing, John, that you will try and cultivate a spirit more in keeping with this season. Do not brood over not being able to make money faster. You are really growing envious and avaricious, coveting your neighbor's wealth. By the time we are married, John, you will be like old Cradberry Adams——"

"Oh spare me, sweetheart, I promise anything and everything."

"Dear boy," she said softly, giving me a self-reproachful embrace to compensate for her dark prophecy. "I could not love you better if you were rich as—as—who was the man who turned everything to gold?"

"Midas, my dear?"

"Now you are making fun of me; he had asses' ears, I know, and——"

"And *I* haven't? Thank you, Susy."

"Now, John! Well, perhaps he did turn things to gold too—but I think I meant Cræsus. At any rate, I could not love you better, if you owned a whole mint, so there!"

To which unclassical, but altogether wise conclusion, I responded with much enthusiasm, and Susy then followed me to the door, and I departed. Not without,



however, many glances over my shoulder for another glimpse of her bonny face.

Was there ever a lover who did not sympathize with Orpheus? And I—alas! under what circumstances of trial and doubt was I to see my darling's face again.

On I strode in the dusky winter evening, the snow-flakes falling like dainty blossoms upon me while I crushed thousands of the same wintry flowers beneath my feet.

The streets were thronged with people hurrying to warm firesides, and pleasant family gatherings.

In 1825, Brooklyn was but a small place. It was not until nine years later that it was invested with the name and privileges of a city. Still it was large enough to make a bustling thoroughfare of Fulton Avenue, which at this time did not extend six blocks beyond the present locality of the City Hall. All the stores were crowded into this portion of the town, and this night many were doing their Saturday night's marketing. The streets were bright with lights streaming from store windows, and as I strode along, I soon found myself drifting into the mood Susy had warned me against. Bitterly did I revile the circumstances that found me fortune's slave, instead of her conqueror.

I realized my poverty more keenly as the Christmas season advanced. We were an English family, but had always adopted with those English observances of the Yuletide, the German and Dutch custom of presenting one another with gifts. It is practiced largely now, I believe by all Americans, save in New England,



where I think I have been told it is a custom only slightly observed.

Every quaint and pretty device I saw I longed to bestow upon my darling, and it was the inability to gratify her that made me deplore the decision which had deprived me of my Aunt Mildred's vast fortune. Nor had my life up to a year and a half ago, been calculated to make me in love with poverty, and to-night as I thought over those years of plenty, I closed my teeth together with a sharp sound that bespoke regret and anger. Not regret for my own conduct, but for all it involved of loss and deprivation.

No! I reflected, I must never regret the decision which proved my manly purpose and strength. At least I had acted from a noble motive in refusing to follow my aunt's desires, but there had always rankled in my conscience the doubt whether our angry separation was not due to my own undisciplined nature.

When my father died, leaving me a lad of ten and my brother five years of age to the care of his brothers and sisters, I realized, young as I was, the demand which would eventually be made upon my abilities as a man, to make the small income left us educate my brother as well as myself.

Those were days when children were taught to follow the train of thought established by their elders, and my father had impressed upon me in his last lingering illness, that Harold was to be my first care. For three years following my father's death, we were transferred from one family of relatives to another,



and in those days of necessary restraint, I recognized the contradictory principles laid down for us to follow and missing what makes home so desirable, the steady hand of absolute authority, I soon became a law unto myself. Not that I developed any traits of character wholly lawless or abominable, but I was wilful, violent in temper, and bubbling over with animal spirits.

At this time my Aunt Mildred Willoughby, a widow, returned from abroad. Three times she had assumed matrimonial fetters, and each time the links were golden.

Thus at middle-age, immensely wealthy, eccentric and whimsical she was an irritation and delight to her relatives. One of her whims was always to be known by her maiden name. So after wedding in succession Brownlow, Stafford and Gould, she was known among her friends as Mrs. Mildred Willoughby. Sometimes complications arose, and the name would then be written Willoughby-Gould. But Willoughby she would be.

"It is nonsense this thing of a woman losing her lineal right to her father's name," she would say. "I am a Willoughby, and marriage can confer no greater honor."

We were then living with a cousin of my mother's, Mrs. John Sidney, of Brooklyn, Susy's mother. Aunt Mildred was at once attracted by what she termed my "Willoughby spirit." She did not pause to reflect that in a not far distant future the indomitable pride



she beheld in the child might rise to confront her, and lead to infinite pain and bitterness.

Harold, with his sonsie face, dark eyes, and sweet-tempered laughter, did not call forth her admiration, although he had the promise of far more beauty than I possessed. I was a Willoughby in complexion, having fair hair and blue eyes, and my resemblance to my aunt was striking.

So the question of my adoption was discussed in family conclave, and it was decided that Aunt Mildred's offer to make me her heir was not to be refused. I had already fully weighed and decided the question, before being told their decision. For I reasoned that Harold could have all father left us for both and thus have a college education, for in my day this latter means of attaining knowledge was like a much desired Paradise.

So I was parted from my brother, and entered on my new life, with a strange aching at my heart, at the separation. Many a time I awoke during the first year, feeling over the pillow for the dark head of my little brother, and I then would sob myself to sleep upon finding it was not there.

I remember once in a passion of grief, I twisted my fingers in the lace on the pillow tearing it into shreds. I was too proud to acknowledge these homesick moods, that tortured me, for fear of being thought unmanly.

Harold meanwhile lived with Aunt Sidney. I never lost an opportunity of seeing him. Sometimes I of-



fended Aunt Mildred by this pertinacious affection. She was jealous, and exacting, and as I grew older, I began to feel the trammels of my position. Harold had chosen art as a profession. He was wrapped up in his future, narrow as his education had necessarily become, because of the meagerness of the sum left by my father, and while I wanted for nothing, and was lauded and féted as my aunt's heir, I was yet made to feel how helpless I was to give Harold the aid he needed. I was still writhing under a harsh blow she had dealt my pride, in rebuke for having given Harold an advantage hitherto denied him, when she broached a subject long dear to her heart. She wished me to enter a Theological school at once, and study to take orders.

The idea seemed to me a preposterous one. I had always been a reasonably devout churchman, but had my inclinations not been against such a career, my conscience would have cried out on my unworthiness to ever fulfill such an office.

I had chosen my career. I was in love with the life faintly shadowed forth by the last year at college. I was determined to breast a troubled sea of printer's ink, and launch forth in literary pursuits. I refused determinedly to meet her views. We were both hot tempered, and my curt refusal led to a breach that widened into an estrangement.

Then she sent for my brother. She knew how I loved the lad. She distressed him by an account of our last interview. She was sincerely heart-broken and



mourned me persistently as one dead to her. She defeated all Harold's efforts to defend me, by madly bewailing my ignoble conduct. Poor fellow! he knew so well my hot-blooded resentment, and reckless moods, and while he knew in the main I was acting from a true motive, yet he felt my refusal had been ungracious and ungrateful.

She then begged him to take my place. She was old and lonely and through his brother she had been rendered more desolate. She had learned to lean upon me, when behold! the staff had broken. Harold was only twenty years of age. He was very tender-hearted and had learned to love my aunt because she had been so kind to me. He wanted to loyally serve both. He pleaded my cause earnestly, then came to me in great distress. I was as curt with him as I had been with my aunt. I was still hot with passion, at the words uttered by my aunt in her interview with me. I let my brother depart looking dazed and heartsore at my harsh language, and the sun set upon my anger.

The following day found Harold again in my presence. Manly, gentle, my superior by a thousand graces, he came to sue my pardon, and beg my counsel.

I bowed down before this gentle spirit humbly. I went with him to my aunt, trying to cultivate a reasonable and dispassionate judgment on the way, in order to deal with the question about to arise.

But alas! only an infinitely more trying scene ensued, but I succeeded in saying right boldly and sincerely



that I hoped she would find in Harold all I lacked of obedience and love.

She forbade me ever to enter her presence again, and I left her house with a heart much heavier than my purse, and faced the world all the more grimly that up to this hour I had only basked in her smiles. My brother came to me at once, offering to transfer the slender income I had relinquished when my Aunt adopted me. I refused it disdainfully, checking all advice and sympathy. I procured a position which through my dogged perseverance soon led to a better one. I was now on the staff of one of the leading New York journals, conducting the branch office in Brooklyn. I was impatient, however, at the delay of my marriage and my inability to make money faster.

Harold had quietly transferred to me the principal of our father's income, and I had in my usual haste invested it in some mines in Western Pennsylvania, and as yet they had failed to make any return.

My aunt had highly approved of my engagement to Susy Sidney, but now being angry with me she partially withdrew her favor from Susy. Susy still went to see her at stated intervals, and endured with stifled indignation her tirades hurled at my defenseless head.

I had never seen my aunt since she so utterly renounced me, but I was thinking of her now, with a degree of grimness only equaled by my former affection for her.

Susy's words were full of wisdom. Where so



much bitterness remained, the old affection still survived. Indifference is love's only real enemy.

As I passed down Fulton Avenue, I came upon one store that seemed especially to taunt me, with its bright window. There was a ring therein which Susy longed to possess and I was powerless to procure it. Verily, in my half angry mood, I endowed the glittering silver and gold in the window with life, and fancied the whole array gave a vicious wink of triumph at my inability to enter and secure the ring. In fact I was so far from obeying Susy's parting injunction that I was fast burying myself in covetous longings, convinced that I was the most ill-used man in all Brooklyn. I was hurrying past the jewelry store, vindictively plunging my hands into my overcoat pockets, when a hand fell on my shoulder, and a cheery voice exclaimed:

"John, old boy, are you running a race with the wind? I have been chasing you for half a square."

It was my brother. Tall, dark and handsome, he half leaned against me, panting, a smile displaying his firm white teeth, as he grasped my arm. I responded with enforced heartiness. We had striven very hard of late to avoid all unpleasant topics, and to especially ignore the gulf that lay between our positions. It is needless to say Harold succeeded better than I did.

"What brings you out at this hour, Harold? Are not these the moments usually devoted to a dinner toilette, or have you forsworn fashion's fetters, and returned to your former erratic artist hours?"



"I—that is—I dined early to-day. I was in hopes of finding you on your way to the office," he replied. "The truth is, John," he added, as if anxious to have a disagreeable task over, "I thought you might want to borrow a little money of me. I know what it is to be short—and—" he paused, faltering a little as he saw my brow darken—"I want also to beg you to sell out that stock you have in those mines. It is going down with a crash before long."

I did not reply at once. I had no desire with Susy's words still ringing in my ears to wound my brother by the hasty reply that rose to my lips.

"Thank you, Harold, but you know I seldom borrow money. It is a bad practice. Let me warn you against it."

I spoke with a sarcastic dryness, and although I pretended to be looking straight ahead of me, I saw that Harold colored to the roots of his hair.

"But the stock?" he urged persistently.

"It is as safe an investment as can be made," I replied. "Kennedy has his money in it, and with all his spiritualistic predilection, you must acknowledge he is safe in a business transaction."

"In that, I grant him a very materialist," returned Harold, dismissing the subject in a manner that betrayed his vexation.

"How is Susy?"

"You should know. You saw her yesterday," I returned shortly.

Harold was certainly not quite frank with me to-day,



and I was only too quick to resent it. He turned a quick glance upon me now.

"Yes," he said, "I saw the little woman yesterday, as she returned from church. She looks as bonnie as ever, and has invited me to join the holiday festivities at home. Home it always will be to me. I presume you will also be present?"

"Without doubt. I cannot conceive why you and Susy should think I would be otherwise than glad to meet you there," I returned, a little testily. "I am no dog in the manger. I love my brother as heartily to-day as ever. A man does not forget his life-love in the first hour of trial and adversity."

"Spoken like yourself, John!" he said heartily, "and so like the good old days of yore, that it gives me courage to ask a favor of you."

"Of me? You? Now, come, Harold, I will have none of your money."

"No, no, I will not offend in that manner again. But I want to get Susy some trifle, as a Christmas gift, and not long since I heard her express a desire for a certain ring set with turquoise, she had seen in a jeweler's window. I want to give it to her. I will not do so without your permission, for you have a pre-empted claim on our sweet cousin."

It was a hard moment for me. This was the gift I had so longed to give my darling. The very desire which had raised the storm of battling thoughts within me just before meeting my brother. He wished to give her a trifle! It had come to this between us!



What should I reply?

"Susy will be delighted," I returned, quietly, laying a strong hand on my bitter reflections.

"I may secure it then," said Harold, in a tone of gladness, that rewarded me for my self-control, "and you will help me choose it, John? She will think more of it, when I tell her this in giving it to her. Come, let us return at once; we have passed the store."

We retraced our steps, and I tried hard to stifle the rebellious voice within me, as Harold chatted merrily.

"Yellow's forsaken,  
Green forsworn,  
Blue is the sweetest,  
Color that's worn."

"You remember old 'Festus,' John, and the couplet and Susy's blue eyes testify to the truth of the rhyme. Bless me, I believe I am more sentimental now than you are, you cold lover."

"To a fault," I replied, rather glad to laugh at him, "since Susy's eyes are gray and not blue."

"Blue, I'll swear it," he cried, stopping a moment in his astonishment.

"Then be forsworn as any green-eyed lover, for Susy's eyes are grayest of gray."

"But tinged with blue-gray like the ocean at sunset, ready to waver into a reflection of the sky at dawn. Grant me this?"

"I grant you are color-blind," I returned amused at his discomfiture.



"I'll eat my hat, if they are not blue," he murmured, and then we entered the jeweler's together.

Harold's eagerness in selecting the ring, and his constant quarrel with me regarding our late discussion, carried on in a way to mystify the jeweler, did not deter my thoughts from reverting to the pledge exchanged between Susy and me, a plain old-fashioned topaz, set in pearls. It had been my mother's ring. In the early days of our betrothal she had worn it, because she liked the association. Later I wished to change it, but she would not consent to a finer jewel.

"I do not care for jewels," she said, "but I do care that your mother once wore this." And so the matter passed.

The ring was chosen at last to Harold's satisfaction, and the dainty device of turquoise and pearl placed in its box. Harold was anxious the box should also be blue and was so innocently and eagerly happy over the selection, that the jeweler could scarcely repress a smile, and fathoming his thought, I was more than pained to find a jealous pang shake my heart.

As we lingered, waiting for the package, some one entered the store and bustled up to us, with an important air.

"Ah! Mr. Kennedy," I said with some warmth, for I was always glad to see my old friend, and at this moment his presence offered a sense of relief.

"My dear boys!" he responded somewhat breathlessly, "just the luckiest thing in the world that I met you. I saw you come in here, and have been waiting



to waylay you. Well, Harold, purchasing a gift for your sweetheart?"

"No," laughed Harold, with a mischievous glance at me. "I have no sweetheart save my cold mistress, Art. But I am sometimes granted the privilege of bestowing my paltry gifts on other men's sweethearts."

The speech jarred on me. I started to speak, but checked myself, and Mr. Kennedy came promptly to the rescue.

"Bad practice, Harold—better get a little sweetheart of your own. It is a safeguard against foolish entanglements," he said, and Harold eagerly interposed:

"Nonsense—you misunderstand me. I——"

"There! I was teasing you, you girlish fellow. There is no need to change countenance like that. Such a red flag is only becoming to a lady's cheek. But come! I want you over at the office, I have a project to unfold to you. Do not refuse me."

"More mines in Western Pennsylvania?" inquired Harold.

"I am in haste——" I began, but Mr. Kennedy interrupted me by exclaiming:

"John, you look like a ghost, you are growing so haggard, with this eternal grind. Come to my office, and I will tell you my wonderful revelation. Harold, hold your saucy tongue, I will have no refusal."

So we were taken by him to his office, despite Harold's laughing protest, and my serious doubts as to the wisdom of wasting more of the evening hours, when I



knew I should have to work until dawn to accomplish all I had in hand.

As I had hinted to Harold in our previous conversation, Mr. Kennedy was a devoted spiritualist. He had been bereft of all his children, and had embraced Spiritualism, as have so many others, to satisfy the yearning grief, hoping to span the gulf of God's eternal love and silence, with his finite earthly affection.

In those days Spiritualism was in its infancy. It seemed to some the work of the evil one. To others, a fantastical belief founded upon incomplete, psychological research. So I was not surprised when Harold made a sly grimace at me behind his hand, when Mr. Kennedy prefaced his remarks as follows:

"Boys, I have had a most wonderful and beautiful revelation from the spirit world, and I intrust it to you, as I would to no one else. If you think me foolish in placing faith in what I have heard, at least hear me with patience."

He then proceeded with his statement. He was gray-haired, and a man of sterling qualities, or we should have treated his disclosure with less consideration. His earnestness and fervor with our love and respect for him, made Harold repress his amusement during the recital.

Recently his wife had developed remarkable clairvoyant power, and during one of her trances the following communication had been made to her.

Flatbush, as every one reading this narrative will doubtless remember, was the scene of many historical



events during the Revolutionary war. Mrs. Kennedy's spiritualistic communication was regarding an old colonial house, which stood in partial ruin in that ancient town. A spirit, who professed to have formerly worn the flashing scarlet garb of a British officer, told Mrs. Kennedy that he had at that time stored a large amount of gold coin, family plate and jewels in the cellar of this house. Directions were given to her how to reach the cellar, and a minute description of an iron door bearing a concealed iron ring, which when lifted would disclose the wealth half a century old.

The friendly spirit also added that as there were no heirs living, it would belong to whoever discovered the treasure.

"I do not remember any house in Flatbush, do you, John? my friend concluded.

"Why it can only be the old Axtell place, Axtell Hall," I replied lazily, trying not to smile at his earnestness. "It is said to be haunted and your friendly but mercenary spirit may be its familiar ghost. Yet I can hardly believe wealth lies concealed in its cellars. It has been empty ever since the last owner lost his fortune. But you do not place credence in the communication, Mr. Kennedy?"

"John, that is no way to speak of a revelation of this nature. Now, really, I was glad to meet you to-night. I had a fancy for you both as companions for an expedition I was going to propose. I thought——"

"P—h—e—w." Harold drew a long whistle. "You have it in your mind to go prowling about



Flatbush, into haunted houses, hunting spiritualistic friends on a night like this!" And Harold shrugged his shoulders, with utter disgust at such a suggestion.

Mr. Kennedy cast an appealing glance at me.

"Now, Harold! I have already investigated a little. If you will only join me——"

"My dear friend, it is out of the question," I replied. "If it was not nonsense to be so mislead. I know the old house and its romantic legends. It has been altered somewhat of late, but still presents very much the same appearance as in old Col. Axtell's time. But it is folly to suppose money or jewels could be concealed there. Let me dissuade you from this wild goose chase."

"Not even for the goose of the golden egg, Jack?" he asked coaxingly. "Come, think better of it. If you will accompany me now, we can be back for a supper by ten o'clock. Come, lads, gratify an old man's whim."

"I would gladly oblige you, but I really must be at the office within half an hour. I have little time for pleasure jaunts now. Take Harold."

"And Harold has got to take himself to an engagement made for seven o'clock. So I too must decline."

"Well, I am sorry, boys. Some other night then. And how is little puss? Well, I hope?"

"Susy is always well and happy." Harold answered for me cheerily, for I really was thinking so busily of Mr. Kennedy's reference to the golden egg, that I did not catch the drift of his last question.



"Susy—yes," I stammered, a little disconcerted by Harold's smooth tone. "Susy is very well, indeed."

"And you will go with me some other night, boys? It is an engagement?"

"By all means if it will gratify you. I have often been in the old house. Colonel Axtell is supposed to have built it in 1749. It was a rendezvous for his famous Nassau Blues, or 'Holy Ghosts,' as they profanely called themselves. The history of the house is interesting."

I spoke heartily to atone for my former incredulous speeches, and after promising to return soon and give him the remainder of my information regarding the house, Harold and I departed.

Once without the office, we laughed heartily over this last whim of our old friend.

"It has a rich flavor of romance, Harold," I said. "Imagine the charm of finding jewelry and plate, hidden so many years, in the somber depth of that old cellar. A curious old cellar it is too, with many turns and twists and secret passages. They say more than one patriot has languished and died within its walls, captured by Colonel Axtell's 'Nasty Blues,' as the people termed them."

"There is foundation for a novel in three volumes, in the very suggestion of the jewels," laughed Harold. "I confess they have a fascination for me. Fancy, old fellow, finding a string of pearls to wind about Susy's creamy throat. Turquoise, diamonds, even rubies to deck her golden hair!"



"See here, Harold," I replied sharply, "conjure up your own scene, and deck a sweetheart of your own finding. Susy will wear no pearls of your getting, trust my word for it."

Harold gave me an astonished stare, then laughed shortly and rather unpleasantly.

"Beg your pardon, John, if I have offended, but I fail to see any just cause for offense. Good night. I will leave you here. I shall be down-town until late. I will call at the office for you, and we will go up-town together."

"Better not, Harold. I am in a regular bear's mood to-night."

"I know it, but I am determined to stick to you. Your temper seems to have parted company with your spirits. One is at ninety in the shade, the other below zero. Cheer up, brother of mine, I shall call for you about ten."

"Until then, adieu," I responded, and I watched the tall graceful figure walk away from me, with a sigh of relief.

Why was I so determined to encourage the sad spirit, and nurse my grievance in the face of his frank affection? Why did I feel he had no right to procure that ring? Now that the test of poverty came to me would it find me a characterless grumbler at fate, rather than a soldier in the battle?

These better, because remorseful, reflections brought me to the office door, and I was soon engrossed in clippings and notices, to the exclusion of other thoughts.



It was eleven o'clock, and I had just leaned back in my chair, yawning frightfully, when my brother came into the office. He looked pale, and seemed fatigued.

"I feared you would be gone," he said, leaning on my desk with a wistful look in his dark eyes. "I will have to ask your hospitality for the night. I have mislaid my latch-key. May I go to your lodgings?"

I responded heartily, something in his tone touched me. I seemed to see once more the little lad who, during our boyhood, was always gently cognizant of my prerogative as his senior.

"I am pleased to be able to atone in some way for my nasty humor lately. But, Harold, you look as dejected as you accused me of being, a few hours ago."

"It is nothing—I have a headache," he said, passing his hand over his eyes.

I looked at him again keenly, and wondered at his coming back up-town if he felt ill, for he had a handsome studio, and a suite of rooms, aside from his home with my aunt.

Months afterward I understood his desire to be near me. A short speech of mine had opened his eyes to the secret of his heart. His hour of temptation was at hand. In discovering the truth of his own wayward fancy, amid the pain awakened by such a revelation, he had no envious or unkindly thoughts. His young soul stood appalled at the world of darkness that opened beneath his feet. He was shaken with a sad fear. Yet while I had supplied the key which unlocked the floodgate of this mysterious tide of woe, I was at the



time utterly unconscious of all save my own anxieties. I was about to lock my desk, when the errand boy came from the outer office saying :

“ An old gent, in a desperate hurry to see you, sir.”

“ Show him in, I replied, adding vexedly. “ Now who the devil comes at this hour? ”

When to our intense surprise Mr. Kennedy came hurriedly into the office, in an evident state of excitement.

He gave vent to an exclamation of pleasure at seeing Harold, and grasping my arm, said impressively, and breathlessly :

“ John, Harold, I have been to the house. It is Axtell Hall. The revelation is a truthful one and I want your assistance. You must come with me at once,



## CHAPTER II.

"I have shot mine arrow o'er the house,  
And hurt my brother."

"THE house? Axtell Hall?" I stammered, while Harold exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes; I was too eager to postpone my investigations. I have been in the cellar where this treasure lies concealed, under an iron door. I came for you to assist me. The girl knows very little English."

"A woman in the case!" quoth Harold, with an unbecoming curl of his youthful lip.

"Yes; half the house is used, occupied by some one who looks after the property. She is a slip of a girl, and I told her I would return in an hour or more. I want witnesses to this remarkable revelation. And besides, I have no strength for the task. The iron door is a heavy one. I am fortunate in finding you both here. You cannot refuse me; I have a carriage at the door."

I exchanged a glance of dismay with Harold, who tapped his forehead significantly. I knew Mr. Kennedy's earnestness in following up this clue was not owing to love of gain. He was a man of wealth. He only desired to confirm the spiritualistic revelation



made by his wife. He was so eager and excited that I understood, and shared the anxiety, that had prompted Harold to the silent gesture. We both feared for his reason, and resolved to go with him, to assure ourselves that spiritualism had not unhinged his mind.

I hurriedly penned a few lines to my assistant whom I was expecting every minute, and taking my pistol from my desk drawer, prepared with Harold to follow our old friend.

We found a carriage awaiting us, and drove rapidly through the town; past stores closing for the night; past the dwelling houses, where lights twinkled from chamber windows, and on out toward Flatbush.

The snow had ceased to fall, and a faint shadowy moonlight illumed the landscape. As we bowled along Flatbush Avenue, Harold alone ventured a remark that was intended to be jovial, but it passed our friend by, as did the frosty air sweeping in the carriage window, which he insisted upon lowering.

Suddenly our progress became slower, and I knew we were nearing the old house I had so often gazed upon in my childhood, thrilling with horror and curiosity at the knowledge of its being haunted. My friend signaled the coachman to stop.

"We must get out here, boys. We cannot drive into the yard. Besides, the man better go back to the 'Three Bells' and wait for us in comfort. Do you hear, James?" he added to the coachman, "come back to this gate in an hour."



"Ay, sir;" responded James, and we were left standing before the high, quaint iron gateway, the snow lying in drifts about us.

"Forward, General," said Harold, with determined cheerfulness.

"Are we to climb the gate?" I inquired, "because it had been iron bolted for years to my knowledge."

"You are abominably skeptical, boys. Have a little faith," returned Mr. Kennedy impatiently. "Come, this way."

He led us some distance, until we reached what appeared only a stronger portion of the seemingly impregnable fence. Then he paused.

"Put your shoulder against that bar, and push, John, you are the strongest. Push very hard." I obeyed, and an iron panel yielded to the pressure, and swung back, and we entered the yard.

But we were still, as I well knew, far from the house, for it was situated so far back, that little more than the chimneys could be seen from the road. Our way lay now through a trodden path, and I was surprised into a question, albeit the gloom and mystery of the adventure had checked me heretofore.

"Did you also know of that gate through your revelation?"

"No. When I came to the house two hours ago I came upon it from the rear, James having driven by a cross road from the town. I found in the house a young girl, alone, and she said her folks had been



living there. She led me here upon my departure. She seemed eager that I should return with my friends, as I said I should. Be careful, Harold, you are wide of the path, boy."

Mr. Kennedy's tone was one of suppressed excitement, and nothing more was said until we reached the house.

I had always known Axtell Hall as one of the oldest houses in Flatbush. It was the only house in the town of decided English architecture, and must, in its day, have been a costly and elegant mansion.

It was a frame house built of heavy hewn timber, solid and strong, a rambling structure, two stories and a half high, with wings on either end. The steep roof slanted in various directions and quaint gables and turreted towers made their appearance, completely destroying any conformity of design. The windows were large and numerous.

As it loomed upon my vision, it appeared a dark and gloomy pile, haunted by ghosts of other days, when mirth, revelry, and even joy might have lingered a welcome guest within its walls.

I confess I felt Harold's hand on my arm with anything but a comfortable start, as he whispered:

"I say, John, are you armed? I do not like the look of this adventure. Kennedy is drunk or crazy to lead us into such a scrape!"

Before I could reply, Mr. Kennedy said: "This way, boys," and plunged into the shadow of one of the deep porches.



We followed, and found him waiting before a small side door, upon which he tapped five times with an old iron knocker. For the first time I descried a faint light glimmering through the diamond shaped pane of one of the large windows.

At Mr. Kennedy's summons it disappeared, and then came flickering down the hall to the door. The door swung heavily back, and a slight girlish form stood before us holding a candle over her head and peering into the night, as if blinded by the wavering flame.

Even in that moment, the rare beauty of the girl was evident. I heard Harold draw a quick breath, but I only gazed at the fair vision of loveliness, the dusky mellow skin, the eyes that shone like stars, and the taper of her slender wrist as she held the candle aloft. I know now that I even noted in that first glance, the gleam of white shoulders that shone through a rent in the shabby black gown, and the womanly attempt to arrange the dark hair that burst forth in wavy masses from the ribbon she wore upon it. She looked at Mr. Kennedy. "Oh! you have come," her voice was low and musical. "Follow me." We obeyed her, passing through a long narrow passage emerging upon a wide hall, which convinced me that we had entered by a side door.

She led us across this spacious oak-paneled hall, with its huge fireplace, and great oak staircase, into a large room that must have once served as a reception room. Now it was devoid of all furniture save a few broken chairs, a small piece of carpet thrown down in



front of the fireplace and a rude bed of straw in one corner.

A feeble fire burned on the hearth, and well in the shadow of the dimly-lighted room, I saw, with the keen glance of a man used to making his observations available for daily bread, that a box under a window had been used as a dining table, while at one end of it was placed a miniature crucifix and small missal.

The girl placed the candle on the mantel-shelf and offered us chairs, with a grace of hospitality that I could see amused Harold not a little.

I leaned against the mantel-shelf and gazed into the fire, somewhat embarrassed to find the girl's gaze fixed upon me. Harold stood watching her, his hand on the chair which she had offered him, the light playing over his handsome face and form. Mr. Kennedy seemed somewhat at a loss to proceed, but the girl took the initiative.

"Why do you bring two men here?" she asked, and I detected then that she spoke with a strong accent. "You said you would bring but *one*."

"I brought the one of whom I spoke, and also his brother. They are both young and my devoted friends. There is no secret in this venture," returned Mr. Kennedy, but I detected an uneasiness in his glance, the first he had displayed. The excitement under which he labored was giving place to anxiety, and I felt that he realized under the glamour of those beautiful eyes, the risk he ran in bringing us hither. There was a moment's silence, then the girl spoke.



"But which is the one of these men you told me was to be married to the sweet, fair girl you called——"

For once Harold out-stripped me in speech. He turned fiercely upon Mr. Kennedy. "You!—You!—to speak her fair name here. How dare you so betray a friend—have you lost all sense of the fitness of things? are you——"

"I spoke no names, I—I—did not know—I told her—that—that——" stammered Mr. Kennedy in confusion.

"Harold!" My voice was full of astonishment mingled with displeasure, as my hand fell in warning upon his shoulder.

But the girl gave a low laugh, and pointed a derisive finger at Harold's flushed face.

"Oh! I thought I should discover Sir Lover, nor was I wrong," she said. "Do not be angry. The kind old gentleman told me but little. But it made me long to know more. Besides it suited my purpose. I am only a little lonely girl, and I like to think about the fair girl and her lover. There is no harm, so don't be angry."

She spoke in a tone of plaintive appeal, but I scarcely heard her. Even in the dim light, I saw Harold's face grow white to the lips, and his eyes sank beneath my gaze, when she addressed him as Susy's lover. I dropped my hand from his shoulder and turned away. A great fear shook me. But the girl gave us no time for speech or reflection. She stepped up to me.

"Come with me," she said, in a low tone, "you are



young, strong, and determined in purpose. You can lift the weight. The treasure beneath it is *mine*. You shall have it upon one condition. Come, I entreat you."

She was so near me that I felt her swift warm breath upon my face. I knew my companions did not hear this speech. There was something in the depths of the girl's eyes that stirred me to pity, even amid the tumultuous thought overwhelming me.

"It is all there," she continued in a low rapid tone, "untold wealth, and all is *yours* on certain conditions. You will follow me?" "Yes," I replied, and went with her a few steps when Mr. Kennedy interfered.

"Not alone, John," he said in a troubled voice, for the glance exchanged between Harold and myself had not escaped him. Our old friend already wished himself well away from the house. "I cannot permit you to go alone into that cellar. She can conduct us all there."

The girl cast a despairing glance at our friend, one of vexation and partial amusement. "As you wish," she said indifferently, and lifting the candle from the mantel-shelf, she beckoned us to follow her. I was immediately behind her, and I walked as one in a dream, hearing the footsteps of my companions yet fearing to look back lest a ghost should confront me. The ghost of that newly-risen secret, reflected in Harold's face;—Harold, the brother whom I loved with devotion only known to those to whom the ties of blood are few. A few months in life's changeful events had



made my heritage his. Was the love of my life, which seemed the very tissue of my soul, to follow in the wake of my wealth? No! no! I thought. Harold is too true to tempt my darling to forsake me. He has sought to bury this secret, but a careless word has brought its ghost from the grave. It is but a ghost. He is young and will conquer himself.

That he loved my darling passionately, that her very name sent every pulse throbbing, as mine in the security of Susy's affection had never been stirred, was shown in that outburst of indignation called forth by the girl's ingenuity. Yet Harold would never— Ah! but the ring, I saw it on Susy's hand; I pictured him giving it to her, and such anger seized me that I could have turned back upon him then and called him to account. Did he realize, as he selected the ring, all this last hour revealed? Oh! That I might force a confession from him, as I had often done in the days of his childish offenses. With my senses already warped and disturbed by doubt, this suspicion led me to see myself already stripped of Susy's affection, drifting, a helpless wight upon the tide of ill-fortune, to a sea of darkness and misery.

We had now followed the girl down the long hall, and commenced descending into the basement. The feeble candle-light scarce dispelled the darkness, and the stairs were precipitous. In the long corridor of the basement we seemed to traverse miles. No word was spoken, as we went down still another small flight of stairs to the cellar.



A rush of damp air struck our faces as the door of the cellar opened and then swung heavily behind us. A damp moisture seemed clinging to the walls as we advanced down the first short alley. I saw the girl shiver more than once as she walked in advance, the candle lifted above her head, sending its flickering light over her dark tresses, defining the outline of her slender wrist and white hand uplifted against the darkness. Occasionally we came upon a huge door that seemed to bar our passage, when the girl would suddenly turn into what seemed like a wall beyond, and we, following quickly, would find ourselves entering on another long alley.

I had often heard of the resources of this cellar (from the history of Flatbush) and, as a lad, I had listened to the tales recounted of the haunted house. But while I had been told that a goodly company of soldiers might lurk here, undiscovered, and that in Colonel Axtell's time many a prisoner had languished and died in these vaults, still I had formed little idea of the extent of the underground passage. I understood as I never had before, how Colonel Axtell and his followers, the Nassau Blues, had carried on their mode of warfare during the revolutionary struggle, and how many daring and cruel deeds could have been committed within these walls. Once the girl paused and looked back anxiously, as she stepped carefully around a door in the ground.

"Step carefully around the door," she said, "they



say there is a dungeon beneath. I hate the door, it looks so frail."

I turned to warn the others, and caught Harold's arm, just as he trod with one foot on the door. Our eyes met as I spoke, and I saw the trouble and pain in his face, as he fathomed the suspicions lurking within me. He grasped my hand in the gloom and whispered: "Oh! John, forgive me!"

But I twisted my fingers from his, and recognizing only a miserable surrender to weakness in the cry, I turned from him to follow the girl again. To me his words were a helpless confession, confirming my fears and hardening my heart. In that moment I hated my brother, and opened the door to all the temptations that were to follow.

We were now traversing the last long alley. Huge spiders hung in cobwebs and ran into corners at sight of us; while the scurry of flying feet showed it to be the abiding place of vermin. Once the girl shuddered and shrank back against me, and involuntarily I stretched out my arm to protect her, but at my touch she quickly recovered herself.

She paused finally, throwing the light of her candle upon the ground. There firmly imbedded in the pavement of the cellar was a weight, such as we see sometimes used over cellar holes, only much larger. An iron ring was attached to the center of the weight.

"This is the spot to which I led you," she said, looking at Mr. Kennedy.

"Yes," he replied, almost in a whisper, "I think so."



"You told me there was a treasure beneath this weight. Now, if your friends have strength, let them find it." She spoke slowly, as if finding it a little hard to construct an English sentence to suit her purpose, and I heard her murmur in French: "I did not deceive him."

I was an excellent French scholar, and the words startled me a little, but after some hesitation I bent to grasp the ring and strove vainly to move the weight. The girl smiled gently. Harold took the candle from her hand so abruptly that she gave a slight scream, but without heeding her, he searched the part of the cellar in which we stood, and returned with a curious iron bar.

There was a resolute impatience upon his youthful face. I knew he felt scorn for the folly of our situation and determined this scene should terminate swiftly.

With the iron bar beneath the edge of the weight, he bade me lift with all my strength. Our efforts were rewarded for the iron slid slowly aside, and made it possible for us to see into the huge black hole beneath.

In a moment the candle was thrust into the gloom, and Mr. Kennedy and Harold knelt on the edge of the hole. At the same moment I felt the girl's hand fall on my arm, and she whispered: "You will follow me later? I have your promise. Trust me, trust Janita."

"Yes, yes," I replied, in my surprise.

"There is positively nothing here," said Harold, rising after a thorough examination.



"Nothing!" echoed Mr. Kennedy in a tone of as much relief as disappointment.

"No, you have been misled, Mr. Kennedy, and there is nothing for us to do but reward this little girl for her trouble and depart. For my part I am quite ready to go."

Harold spoke authoritatively, with a tacit rebuke to his elders in tone. The young girl turned an angry glance upon him.

"I am not a beggar," she said, "I feared your search would be in vain, but you are rude. I trust you will not speak this way to the girl you marry. She will not love you long, in spite of your handsome face, so be warned."

This time her words came glibly, only with a marked accent. Harold made no reply but turned to depart. We all gladly followed the flickering candle in its journey back to the basement, but when we reached the last door leading into the hall, she held it open for us to pass, and when my companions had gone on she laid a determined hand on my arm, pushed me gently back, and the door swung heavily, while I heard a bolt shoot to its place as I stood in utter darkness.



## CHAPTER III.

"The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices,  
Make instruments to plague us."

—*King Lear.*

I CONFESS my heart gave a painful leap when I thought I was alone, but a soft hand groping to find me, convinced me that the girl was still on my side of the door, as she murmured :

"Mon Dieu ! I have extinguished the candle. Stand still a minute."

There was no inclination on my part to disobey her. With her former warning regarding trap-doors still in my ears, I had no desire to end my life by a descent into an ancient dungeon.

In a moment the candle was lighted again.

"Come with me," she said in nervous haste ; "no one can have what it is mine to give save the man who delivers me. You will help me, I have your word. Come, we must be quick. I know not how your brother will act during your absence. I see he loves fondly. Come."

She led me to the right of the door, where, to my surprise, a steep stairs seemed to end abruptly in the ceiling. She ascended swiftly and pushed against



the ceiling, when a door opened upon a continuation of the stairway. We climbed this second night, until she pushed another door aside and we stood in a square room, which in my bewilderment I judged to be about ten stories from the basement I had just left.

"This is the haunted chamber," said the girl, panting a little from her exertions. "The treasure I told about is hidden here. Even should the house be rented no one occupies this room. The only way to reach it, that is generally known, is by placing a ladder on the outside up to the window. I discovered this secret passage below the ballroom slide. See; I tell you all; I trust you."

I nodded a little uneasily. The girl's confidence troubled me, but touched me also. I could not bear to disappoint her. She went to the mantel-shelf, and then faced me again.

"I am about to show you enough of gold, jewels and plate to make you a wealthy man. It is mine and I give it all to you, on certain conditions. When I show you these I am at your mercy. You can do all for me, a poor girl, whom all but the good mother of God seems to have forsaken. I know she sent you hither. Oh, Sir! Monsieur, listen to me and my request. I am in trouble and you can save me."

"Stop, my child," I interposed, alarmed by this preface. "You must not think I have any power to help you. I am a poor man, one whom——"

"Nay, I know you are not rich, but I have all this money. It is something money cannot buy that I want.



Protection. Your advice. Listen: My name is Orme, Janita Orme. Your old friend in some strange way knew of this money, but he thought it was money hidden here years ago. I know better than that, but you must not question me, for I will give it all to you provided you marry me."

I started in astonishment and caught my breath in a gasp.

"Impossible! Miss Orme; I—you——"

"Call me Janita," she interposed, giving the soft sound to the J, making it sweet music to the ear. "But do not refuse me. It is my escape, my only escape from from something worse than death."

"But it is impossible. I am engaged to be married. My friend has told you——"

"You! and it is you that loves the—ah! I see," slowly nodding. "You let me taunt your brother—and—and—you both love this girl. That is what made him grow so white. I understand—I understand!"

"You are a fiend, to read me thus."

"I am no fiend, but a girl who wants liberty. No matter if you are engaged a thousand times. Take this money and grant my request. I shall not annoy you. I do not think I *love* you, but give me your name, take me away from here. Let me be your wife for one brief day, and then send me whither you will, to France—to a convent—only help me to escape a fate harder than I dare reveal."

"But, Janita, I cannot have two wives, I am betrothed——"



"Oh, I shall only be your wife in name. It will give me the power to leave this country, to elude pursuit. Oh, sir, you must listen to me."

A sudden sense of humor seized me just at this moment. I smiled a little as I said:

"Janita, if my name and protection is all you desire, I can legally adopt you. You may become my daughter."

"You, my father, with that face? Besides, I should have to go with you to some public place. Do not turn away from me. Hear me, Oh! dear young sir. No one shall know of our marriage save my priest. I will tell no one. I will go anywhere, do anything you say, only help me. God will forgive us this sin, since you save me from another and a greater one. For if you will not listen I will kill myself, rather than live with what is in store for me. See, I give you all this money, you can marry your sweetheart, give her bright and beautiful jewels, and forget you ever saved and helped little Janita. I shall not trouble you. Send me back to France, to the convent, anywhere. Ah! sir, if you do not listen you may still live to see your love taken from you, and be like me to-night, disconsolate. That brother loves with greater passion than moves your colder heart. May he not win yet? Help Janita, and gain your sweetheart wife at once."

I sprang from her with an exclamation, and with my hands over my forehead paced the room. Looking back now on that moment of horrible doubt and temptation, I feel that I have put more into the poor girl's mouth



than she really uttered. I know she stammered, often using a French word then lamely substituting an English equivalent. But my jealous fears; my overwhelming sense even then, of my brother's superiority, pressed like demons fingers against my heart, and I supplied in thought all her speech lacked in eloquence. She saw, too, the change in my face when she spoke of my brother, and followed to this vantage ground. To me she seemed possessed with the power of reading my thoughts. As I came back the third time I paused, gazing at her. She stood watching me, her face full of eager hope, her little girlish form swaying toward me.

Why should I not grant her request? A sudden calm came upon me after the struggle of the moment. Why should I refuse this fortune within my easy grasp. Why throw away an opportunity of making the girl I loved my happy wife, because the way to do so did not seem so clean and clear as the path I had hitherto followed. What had my staunch adherence to principle gained for me in life? Repudiation at the hand of one I loved. Reproach from my brother, the knowledge that even Susy doubted the wisdom of my conduct.

In my hurried recapitulation one can readily see how I thrust forward my own mistakes, to bear the burden of my real motive. They had never blamed me for my allegiance to my true instinct, but the manner in which I carried out that allegiance. Then what harm could I do this girl? None whatever. All she asked



was that I should simply marry her, and get her safely out of the country. Young, beautiful, she should be treated with the greatest respect and care.

"You have consented," she said, creeping up to me, and lifting her lovely dark eyes to read my face.

I took her hands in mine then, and looked down into her eyes.

"Swear, as you hope to save your soul, you will never betray our union, and I in turn swear to protect you as you desire, and as in your youth and beauty you deserve. You cannot realize all this means now, and I trust you can never realize as I do all you have done to-night."

"I do not understand. Tell me how to say it."

"I, Janita Orme, solemnly swear to keep my faith with John Willoughby. So help me God."

She repeated it after me mechanically, then bent and pressed her lips to my hand, while I felt her tears fall upon it. This startled me. I drew my hand away, and she hastily brushed her tears aside. It was her first moment of weakness.

"I thank you," she said brokenly. Then she stepped toward the mantel-shelf, and I followed her. With her slender hands she pushed and strove with the panel immediately over the fireplace.

"I have not the strength. Put your hands as I do and push," she said, panting.

I did so and the panel slid slowly back, disclosing a hollow square, and in the square was a box of wood with iron clamps at the corners. I dragged it forth



with a great effort, and placed it on the floor, and Janita's hands trembled as she strove with the clasp.

"The money is not here," she said, "look again in the slide." I rose quickly and putting my hand in the square brought forth a bag of money, another, and still another. I opened one of the bags and found in it both English gold and silver, and considerable United States coin.

I was reaching in once more, baffled by the flickering candle-light that gave me but a partial glimpse of the depth of the square, when an exclamation from the girl fell on my ear. I glanced toward her.

She was employed decking herself in the jewels from the box. Diamonds sparkled in her ears, a royal diadem of rubies shone amid her dark tresses, she had wound around her white throat a strand of yellow pearls, and about her slender wrists glimmered rich gems. She was contemplating the reflection of her grandeur in a small mirror she had found in the box. Something in the innocence of her childish delight and its incongruity with the jewels, many of which had doubtless bought souls to "be cast into outer darkness," smote me heavily. I spoke therefore sharply, as to a child.

"Janita, replace those jewels. They do not belong to you, nor do they become you."

"How dare you so to lie about me!" she replied, with sudden anger. "You know I am beautiful."

But she snatched the jewels from her wrist and hair, only pausing as she touched the pearls on her neck.



"Let me keep these."

"No, I wish to have those more than all the box contains," I said eagerly, remembering Harold's words that evening. Ah! Susy should never wear pearls given her by Harold now, I thought with exultation.

"Will you grant me nothing?" said Janita, plaintively. "These are my very own. They were my mother's. Must you have them? I have asked so little."

Her lashes drooped, but I saw the quiver of those lovely lips.

"Take them, Janita," I said grimly. "You will ask for my soul next."

Already I felt what a power the helplessness of her position exercised over me.

We carefully restored all the treasures to the square, as I decided at once it must be removed cautiously.

"You must tell the old man down-stairs it was not true that money lay hidden here," Janita said as we were restoring the jewel box.

"Good heavens! he will suspect my wealth," I cried aghast.

"Oh, no; he knows nothing. I took him to the other side, to a cellar. He had a dream—something told him of a treasure there. It was not there—he looked and saw it not."

She gave a dainty little shrug, spreading her hands an instant and smiling. The gesture was irresistible and I smiled also.



"Wise little one," I said, in a caressing tone, as to a child, then checked myself hastily, as I realized all my speech involved. I was approving her deceit. But she spoke quickly.

"And now when will you marry me? Meet me on the third night from this at the church door, in the small church beyond this road. You know it?"

"I know there is such a church—it is a Catholic church—I am a Protestant, Janita."

"No matter—you will come, or better, perhaps you can bring some one. You know so much." She looked eagerly for confirmation.

"Listen, Janita, I can get you away from this country without marrying you. I can protect you as well without this——"

"But you swore—you promised—you would *now* deceive me——"

"No, child, not that, but do you not see——"

"No, I see only that you are false, and if I thought you would not do as I say—Oh! Mother of God, have you indeed forsaken me?" She fell upon her knees wringing her hands.

I raised her gently, soothing her as I would a child. She soon grew quiet, and clung to me. Then as if tacitly accepting my care as equivalent to my consent to all that had gone before, she raised her face to me, tear-stained, but lovely, like a repentant child, waiting to be kissed and forgiven. I hesitated, then met the sweet lips with my own, and from that moment I only



longed to possess the wealth I could gain through her. My conscience was dead.

She grew crimson beneath the caress, and drew away from me. Then with no other word, led the way for our return.

I was beyond surprise now, and when half-way down the narrow stairs, she paused and pushed a panel in the wall aside, thus enabling us to emerge upon a large room. I followed her with great confidence. Half-way across the room, however, a shudder seized me. I suddenly recalled all that I had heard of this room. It was the ballroom, through which, in lurid flame, the ghost of Colonel Axtell's mistress had floated, to haunt him and strike death to his heart.

Janita paused, and looked back at me, her great eyes full of something that chilled me strangely.

"I wish," she said softly, "I wish some one loved me."

I can hear the words now as they echoed gently, and they come to me like a wail of loneliness. I made no reply, but laid my hand on my lips, silencing her.

On entering the wide hall from the broad stairway, Mr. Kennedy hastened toward us followed by Harold. Both were agitated.

"What folly is this?" cried Harold, seizing my arm. "We have been in an agony of suspense."

"A foolish whim of the child to frighten us all," I replied calmly. She has even treated me to a ghost."

The resolution to do that which is wrong, makes the first step to the stairway leading downward, and we



find it an easy footing afterwards until we try once more to climb.

"Let us be gone at once," said Mr. Kennedy, nervously.

"My girl, you have taken much trouble in our behalf. Accept this reward. I presume you thought it only just to test our nerves further, but it was a foolish, cruel joke. I trust you will never treat any one else thus. Come lads."

We all passed out of the door through which we came, Janita holding the candle. As I passed her I bore with me a light touch of her hand on mine, and the whispered word—"Remember."



## CHAPTER IV.

"This is the night.

That either makes me or fordoes me quite."

—*Shakespeare*,

THE snow was falling fast once more, as we stumbled along through the grounds on our way to the street, to find the coachman awaiting us in some impatience. In silence we drove rapidly back to Brooklyn.

Once during the drive Mr. Kennedy spoke in evident distress at the indefinable dissension that seemed to lie between us, since Harold's angry exclamation at his want of discretion.

"John—Harold," he said earnestly, "I am sorry to have involved you in a foolish, fruitless adventure. It seems fraught with little save nervous apprehension. I am going to beg of you not to mention it to any one, it would only serve to make us laughing stock. And I must especially beg *your* pardon, John, for inadvertently permitting that little wretch to extract from me your affair with Susy. I hardly remember how I came to speak of it. When I first went there this evening, I found her looking very sad. She had been weeping. I felt sorry for her, and we talked some time. By Jove! she was a little beauty. Not so fair as little Puss, however, eh, John?"



Harold stirred uneasily, at the reference to Susy. But I replied indifferently, and Mr. Kennedy, after an attempt to make Harold talk, lapsed once more into silence.

As we neared my lodgings Harold quietly asked permission to return with Mr. Kennedy to his home, saying that he had mislaid his key. Mr. Kennedy was delighted to have him accept the hospitality of his house, but did not help matters between Harold and myself by adding awkwardly, "But come, I say, boys—you are not going to let that little black-eyed witch make mischief between you. Shake hands, do, or I shall never forgive myself for persuading you to go with me."

"Good night. Will see you to-morrow, Harold," I said, but Harold made no reply. He had not spoken to me since I had turned from him, and his whispered appeal in the cellar. I saw them drive away with a sense of relief. But there was no rest for me that night. I feverishly paced my room and planned my future. I was transported to a new world in which my desire took tangible shape and seemed no longer a mirage, raised by false hope. My appropriation of this wealth brought all within my power. There was no real happiness to me without Susy. My love for her had been the absorbing affection of youth and manhood. The thought of losing her maddened me, while on the other hand, the delight of making her my wife, to have always close at my side she who seemed to be my good angel, made me blind to the course of dishonor



and disgrace I was about to adopt, in order to win her.

How many of us in the eager turmoil of attaining our desire, pause to consider the means by which we gain an end? In small matters, or in great, when temptations assail us, do we not often court the dark influence, smothering conscience with the reflection that our motive is a good one? Some one—some new author in my day I think—has written, "Every woman is a Jesuit at heart." Better far had he written, knowing all humanity, that the Jesuit shrewdly created his maxim to flatter the human heart into a false belief in its own strength. Men and women alike, we lull the waking conscience with a text or two, and go on breaking the commandments at will.

My plan now was to go at once to Susy's parents, inform them of a rise in my position and salary, also of success of certain stock in which I had invested. Thus I would consistently account for my sudden change of fortune. I would arrange for our marriage in two weeks, on Christmas night. We had waited so long we would gladly make haste now.

I should have to gratify the girl Janita's whim for a marriage, but it would really amount to nothing. Even should she persuade her priest to marry us, which I doubted, knowing their objection to performing a marriage secretly, or mysteriously, the girl would have no witnesses, and it would hardly stand in the eyes of the law. No license was necessary, in fact if at this time I had merely stood up in the presence of witnesses and proclaimed myself Janita's husband and she likewise



made known her intention of becoming my wife, it would have been considered a perfectly legal tie. But without witnesses such a ceremony availed nothing. I planned deliberately, without compunction, for the course I was about to pursue. My marriage with Susy, the power of giving her all she craved of luxury, the intense pleasure I should derive from her happiness, absorbed all my being, save those eager impulses that served to achieve my end.

In my later years I have seen men who had lived long lives of usefulness and probity throw away honor and high position by staking all on some bold business speculation to add to their means to deck fair wives and beloved children; straining every nerve to achieve great wealth, using any means, following any channel, however dangerous or dubious, absolutely blind to the dirt with which they stained their hands and utterly oblivious of their moral suicide, and happy in that they might pour luxury upon those they loved. I have seen these men before courts, stricken and dumb in the face of accusation, that left their families a mark for the finger of scorn and anguish.

My heart has gone out to their wretchedness, for I knew they once stood as I did, and being tempted fell, led by what they, in their blind folly, deemed to be the holiest inspiration of their lives.

The dawn found me worn and haggard. I threw myself on the bed for a few hours' sleep before facing the world in my changed condition.

Susy's surprise and pleasure were pretty to witness



when she learned how soon she was to become my bride. I found it a little hard to meet her clear glance, as I had the night before, but I recalled that never old masculine sophistry, that man is never so pure and clean in deed or thought as the woman he loves, and that his contact with a rough world naturally leads him into by-paths he would shudder to have her contemplate.

During the day I made arrangements for Janita's departure. I found a sailing vessel, owned by a Frenchman, and took passage in it for Janita for France, under the name of Mrs. Sydney. As the vessel was to sail in ten days, I also busied myself making other arrangements.

I made various trips to Flatbush and the house in securing the treasure, seeing Janita each visit, and finding her always the same—a woman—yet a child. She seemed anxious that I should remove the money and jewels as rapidly as possible. She was always alone. When the last of the money was removed, however, she detained me one night.

“To-night,” she said, “you will marry me.”

Her eyes shone strangely. She seemed struggling with emotion and fear.

“As you will, Janita. Have you made any arrangement, will your priest marry us?” I asked carelessly.

“Ah! you do not care then. You would have proved false to your word,” she cried passionately. “Are there none true in the world? I believed you, I trusted you!”



"Do not let us have more of this folly. What do you require me to do?" I asked sternly.

"Listen," she said hurriedly. "After to-night I dare not have you come here. If you do, it may be your death. So you must go now, and return at once. Bring some one who will marry us. Fulfill your promise to me, as I have performed mine—or I will betray you to that girl you love."

She finished with a fierce flash in her dark eyes, and I knew she was capable of carrying out the threat. I soothed her by telling her of the arrangements I had already made, and promising to return, departed.

I had little time for reflection. I must return in two hours, and in that time must find some one to perform the marriage ceremony. I had led a very quiet life of drudgery since my rupture with my aunt, dropping entirely out of the social world, and I had made comparatively few friends among those of my profession. There was one, however, with whom I had been recently thrown, in my arrangements for Janita's departure. A guest on the Frenchman's vessel, a young Catholic priest. My thoughts turned at once to him. He seemed the very instrument sent to carry out the purpose. It would gratify Janita, and he having no acquaintance on this side the water, unable to speak any English, and pleased with my use of his language, would oblige me, yet never betray me. I had little difficulty in persuading him to accompany me, although I did not explain the quiet nature of the ceremony. But on the way I told him as much as I thought best.



To my surprise an old woman, bent and homely, opened the door for us at the hall, and led the way to the same large room we had entered before.

A somewhat genial blaze had been kindled on the hearth, and in its glow stood Janita. I shall never forget the sudden thrill that shook me, as I gazed at her. She had arrayed herself in white, a robe somewhat worn, but carefully arranged. Her soft round arms and smooth neck were bare, and she had wound about her throat the pearls I had said might be hers. She raised her great eyes to my face entreatingly, and I then saw in the shadow of the room a dark figure. My heart throbbed painfully with a sudden fear.

"What does this mean?" I demanded of Janita. "I am here to comply with my promise. Who is this man—this woman? You have betrayed me?"

I spoke in French, and at my tone the figure emerged and I knew him to be the priest of whom Janita spoke the night of our first interview.

"I am here to see that this girl is not wronged. I know you as little as I know the girl. I refused to marry you, but I will see that she is not dealt with falsely."

I bent my head in acknowledgment of these slow, stern words, and beckoned to my companion to advance.

The instant relief on the face of the elder priest assured me that I had quieted his fears, while my new friend opened his book, and prepared to make Janita my wife. Of course he spoke in French in making the



first inquiries, then followed the shorter Latin form, used by the Church. I confess I scarcely knew the moment that made me the husband of the trembling girl at my side, my knowledge of Latin being far more limited than my knowledge of French. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the priests exchanged a few words in Latin, and then the elder priest, after admonishing me to care for the girl depending on me for her future, withdrew with the woman, whom I learned afterwards was his housekeeper.

The young priest also withdrew, with instructions to send the vehicle back as soon as possible, for I fully intended that Janita should go aboard the vessel that night. This would involve her being on the vessel a day before setting sail, but all anxiety on my part would be at an end.

Thus we were left alone, in the dimly lighted room. My poor little bride stood pale and drooping before me.

"Are you satisfied?" I asked somewhat bitterly, for I resented her distrust as heartily as if I had not deserved it.

"I am satisfied," she spoke in a low tone.

"Then listen, Janita. As I have kept my promise, you must keep yours. To-night I place you on board the vessel which will take you to France. On Christmas night, now two days hence, I am to be married to—to my betrothed. Here is a paper you must sign, promising never to break faith with me."

She made a gesture of surprise and impatience.

"You have my word! I will not sign a paper. I



want to see this girl you love so well, that you will risk your soul to win her."

I started as if her words were a lash.

"Risk my soul!" I repeated her words, as their weight fell fully upon me.

"Ay, perjurer you cannot but be, when you marry her. I am your true wife." Then softening her voice, "Ah! John—do not look so white—I have promised, I too can be kind. Only let me see her—let me see the pure, fair woman."

"Impossible!" I replied, still turning over her phrase in my mind. Perjured—dishonored—forsworn—these words linked themselves together like mocking fiends, and rose to confront me.

Janita bent toward me, her eyes brimming with tears.

"Are you so cruel to deny me this?" I have given you much wealth,—your heart's desire, yet you refuse me this. Just one glimpse of the woman for whom I am sacrificed."

"It is no sacrifice," I replied. "You wished to marry me thus, asking only what I have granted. Heaven forgive us, it is she who is sacrificed, since you are my wife. Do quickly as I bid you. Sign this paper, make ready to go with me. I have treated you as a woman, but I shall force you to do my bidding like the child you are. Janita, do you hear me?"

I laid my hand on her white arm warningly. She shook off the touch.

"I will not go with you until you promise I shall see your bride. Dare to touch me again as you did



just now, and I——” she drew from some place about her dress a keen little dagger. It was a mere toy, but the flash of her eyes spoke for her purpose. The utter absurdity of such a weapon in her hand, the lack of strength in those white, smooth wrists, would have made me smile at any other time.

“Listen, John Willoughby,” she continued, “I must see the woman you love. Oh! is she so pure and noble I may not even come near her? What does she admire in you. I who am only little Janita might love you as no other woman dare. But she—oh! I will see her!”

I stood dismayed and helpless. In that moment I knew Janita loved me, and I felt how powerless I was to move her, save through that love. This I could never stoop to do. I loathed the thought, but the horror of discovery was strong upon me. I must think and think quickly.

Suddenly Janita started and threw her hands to her head.

“Hark!” she cried, as if listening. “Ah! yes, they return. Go—go—at once. Not that way—oh, not that way!” she cried.

Filled with vague alarm, I turned to the usual mode of egress, the large door. She laid her hand on my arm, drawing me to a side door. In a moment we were racing the length of the basement corridor, and through one of the cellars, to a long dark passage. Here Janita paused leaning against me, panting.

“Go—go—now,” she murmured. “I—I must go



back and meet them. They will only beat me—they would kill you."

"Janita, what does this mean?" I demanded.

"Ask me nothing, but go. Come to-morrow, just before dark, I will do all, anything you ask—yes, yes—John—I will obey, if it kills me."

Before I realized her intention, her soft arms were about my neck, I felt her lips against my face, and her warm tears fell upon me, then with a sob, she fled down the dark alley, and I stood alone.



## CHAPTER V.

"I hear a voice that cries, Alas, Alas !  
Whatever hath been written shall remain,  
Nor be erased, nor written o'er again."

—*Longfellow,*

ONLY my strong desire to relate in truthful detail all that occurred, sparing nought in the narrative that will read as extenuation of my conduct, urges me to write what follows.

God grant that it may appeal to more than one soul trembling before taking the last fatal step, plunging them into an abyss filled with restless pain and remorse. God grant that many who peruse these lines, and remember such a moment of trial and temptation, may also reflect with thankful hearts, that they had strength to stand, and may it make them more lenient toward the weak-hearted.

In the days ensuing between my removal of the last treasure from the old house and my marriage to Susy, I was as a man pursued by furies.

"Perjured, dishonored, forsworn !"

Since Janita's beautiful lips had uttered these words, they had lurked about me like evil spirits.

Not forced upon me, and rousing me to a keen sense of their meaning, but whispering and sighing a muffled



taunt that assailed and shook me, in a choking, stifling undertone, as I bent to my task or talked with some friend.

I fortified myself against every doubt. I crushed down the haunting voice, I would not look behind at what I had been a few weeks before, and compare the secret torture of my life, to the easy discontent of my free conscience.

I fought desperately with my old ideas of honor and morality, my will rendered doubly strong by having to face the inevitable fact, that a confession at this late date would ruin me forever.

Yet even though my strong resolution would break those insidious whispers, "Perjured, dishonored, forsworn"—and I would catch my breath and listen, longing to cry aloud in contradiction. Even now I do not know that I realized the sin I was committing, or whether my agony was not for the horrible scourging terror of having my duplicity discovered. Let him judge who has wrestled with the demons that strove within me.

I had procured a strong box and gradually removed the treasure to my bank. As yet I had not touched the money or jewels. I could not bring myself to bestow the rubies upon Susy. Something withheld me.

I think my brother avoided me carefully. At any rate we saw little of each other after that night at old Axtell Hall. Strangely enough, Mr. Kennedy had advised my selling some Clanmorgan stock I held, and in doing so I doubled the money invested. Thus my bank



account was increased twofold and I felt that this alone would have enabled me to wed my darling. But I dared not dwell upon the thought, it maddened me. To Mr. Kennedy's surprise and satisfaction I put half into his hands to reinvest and he promised it should treble the amount in a short time.

I was now beset with doubt as to whether Janita would keep her promise to me. Even had she signed a contract to do so, I still doubted her fulfilling her part honorably.

I dared not go to the house again until the day she had named for I knew by the terror in her eyes that she had good reason for wishing me to stay away. What was the fear overwhelming her? What mystery lurked behind the words which I scarcely heeded in my eagerness for the treasure. Unlike any other act of my life, had been the avaricious haste with which I had seized the treasure, but I was urged to it by the fiendish jealousy that seemed to have become a guide to all my conduct since I had known that my brother also loved my betrothed.

Only Janita could tell me why the gold I had secured had been buried in Axtell Hall. I had refrained from all questions up to this moment, and now I found myself filled with eager doubts and fears upon this question, yet I was doomed to wait until Christmas Eve, the night before my wedding with Susy, in order to even see Janita again. I should not know until then whether she intended to leave the country as she had promised.



It had been arranged that Susy and I were to be quietly married Christmas day at four o'clock. Susy told me, with a lovely blush, of her simple preparations; of the gown she had fashioned herself, how pretty it was; and how the veil she would wear was her mother's bridal veil. "And Harold was here last night, John," she added slowly.

"Ah! I have not seen Harold for some time."

"He said he thought you would have told him of our marriage. He heard it through Mr. Kennedy. He seemed so hurt, John, that you should not have told him yourself, and he looked pale and thin. He gave me *these* as a wedding gift."

She held forth a small box as she spoke, containing a set of pearls. The earrings were like fairy tears, and the necklace had a diamond clasp, while a long spray of pearls was intended to catch back my darling's sunny hair.

I gazed at the pearls, but said nothing, while I remembered my own thought the night I found the jewels, and my harsh words to my brother. He had not given her the ring, and now I felt he never would do so. Harold had learned to know his heart through procuring the ring, and would hate the sight of it henceforth.

"Are not my pearls beautiful?" asked Susy.

"Yes," I replied and sighed.

"Poor boy, you are tired," she said caressingly. "You are working too hard. But, John dear, you will see Harold, and ask him to come to our wedding? He has



done no wrong, that you should avoid him. We can never expect to conciliate Aunt Mildred, but we must never become estranged from Harold."

I kissed the sweet lips that plead for my brother, while a pain shot through my heart.

"I will ask him Susy," I said "but do not ask me to go to him. You write a nice little note and explain. I am very busy. Or better still, did you not ask him for Christmas eve, to help us in decking the tree? I will see him then, and urge him by all the brotherly love in my power to come and see me meet my doom." I tried to speak very lightly.

"True I had almost forgotten the tree," said Susy, "and we must have it a very bright, beautiful tree, too. The children must remember our wedding day. But John, go to Harold, I pray you. Oh! you must conquer this proud spirit. It breaks my heart, and it is grieving Harold."

Oh! sweet Susy, how little you realized what was wearing on Harold's life, driving the color from his cheeks, and hope from his heart.

I gave her a promise, however, and left her feeling rather than acknowledging the gulf that lay between her innocent spirit and my tortured conscience. I little knew that in fulfilling that promise I should add fuel to the consuming flame of jealousy raging within me, which had already led me into loss of honor.

The next day I went to his studio. I had walked myself into a passive mood of absolute coldness. I found him at work on a large canvas and he sprang up look-



ing surprised and a little confused. This I passed over lightly, assuming an air of gaiety little in keeping with that evil whisper that grew ever louder in my ears, as I jested on my ecstatic condition, due to the near approach of my nuptials.

Harold heard me with downcast eyes, then wrung my hand somewhat nervously, and wished me all happiness. He then told me that he was to go abroad with Aunt Mildred in June. He spoke listlessly, and the old glad light had gone out of his dark eyes; a few stern lines of self-control had settled about his youthful mouth.

"There are things money cannot buy," I reflected as I talked with him, and the whispers suddenly took another form, and replied, stabbing me with every misty breath:

"Ay—honor, and character can never be bought at any price."

"You have heard of the rise in Clan-morgan stock?" I asked him, striving to subdue the ugly voices.

"Yes, I met Mr. Kennedy, and he said your speculation proved a good one, and he presumed it was this and an increase of salary which lead to your marriage. I am glad you have not forgotten to tell me of your good fortune. I fancied you avoided me of late."

And he gave me a wistful, appealing glance.

"Nonsense Harold, men who are struggling with life's issues, as we must henceforth, have little time to devote to the sentimentalities."

"I never was so lonely in my life as during the last



few months," he said mournfully, and turned his face a little away from me. Poor lad! Why did I not clasp his shoulders, and then and there, in the old loving fashion, tell him I understood all he suffered?

"Money will not buy love or contentment," I said mentally, in the silence that followed, and quickly came the reply:

"But it will buy false oaths, dishonor and perjury."

Great Heavens! did the voices speak aloud? No Harold did not start as I had done. He still sat half turned from me, and no word had passed between us since his last speech. I spoke with studied formality.

"You have companions old and new. I did not dream of yours being a lonely existence. I see you have made great progress in your studies. You are to make our name famous, remember."

"I am discouraged, but I shall try to resume my old audacity when I reach Paris."

"What is that head yonder? Surely it is——"

"Susy? yes. Only half finished, you see. I shall complete it for you later," he said, turning the portrait to the wall, with a forced smile; "here is something I sketched from memory. You know my ambition is for figures. I think I shall finish this for Kennedy, and invite him to purchase it in memory of our late adventure."

So saying he placed upon the easel a clever sketch of a girl holding over her head a candle.



It was Janita, her lithe form and delicate arm and wrist, all save the face. That remained a blank.

"Strangely enough I cannot remember the face," said Harold, musingly. "It was a beautiful type too, but the features baffle me. I should be glad of a reasonable explanation of her presence and strange conduct."

I did not reply, I stood gazing upon the sketch, seeing in the blank space upon the paper, a scornful, beautiful face, while I heard like the sudden rush of the wind amid the summer trees, those whispers—"Dishonor, perjured, forsworn!"

As he tossed the sketch aside impatiently I, fearing the effect of my sudden silence, and change of countenance, with an effort gathered myself together, and extended to him in a measured tone the invitation to my marriage.

He turned quickly and looked into my eyes, and in a moment we both knew what was in the other's soul. Harold grew very white, and for a moment I thought he was going to swoon. He tried to speak but failed, and I turned from him and left him in bitter silence. We both understood that we were beyond words, and that henceforth we were only brothers in name.

Christmas eve found me with a goodly task before me. I must make the trip to Flatbush, see Janita, and if possible place her safely on board the sailing vessel. Then return at a reasonable hour to assist Susy in decking the Christmas tree. I had promised



to aid her, in this her last act of sisterly love in the home that had been made so bright by her presence.

The following day I should carry her away as my bride, and on our return from a short sojourn among relatives of Susy's who lived in the mountains, we should live with Susy's parents until I could build my own house. For with the money made with my successful speculation, I intended to build a house, and for the rest, there was the treasure. Yet I shrank even now, as I thought of using this strangely-gotten wealth.

I arrived at the old house that evening at dusk, and tapped gently again and again on the door. There was no response to the summons. I carefully skirted the rear of the house, and tried the basement entrance. It availed nothing, and I stood still in great dismay. I felt Janita's treachery as keenly as if I had acted only a noble part toward her. I mark well that our own ill-deeds seldom equal the proportions of the ill done us. As I stood thus a man came toward me.

"What do you want here?" he demanded, roughly. Then seeing my appearance, he changed his tone at once.

"Beg pardon, sir. I have been placed here as a sort of watchman. Since the Hall has stood empty, they have suspected it of having been broken into, and used as a harbor for tramps and thieves. I mistook you, sir."



"No offense. But do you tell me the house has been long empty?"

"Yes, sir. Leastways it's been a good bit of two years. It's haunted they do say," he added with a grin, "but I reckon it is mainly by rats and spiders. Folks say they've seen lights flittin' around, but it is their own light-headedness I guess, and they mistook it."

"I was impressed by the peculiar architecture. Who owns the house?" I asked, glad that the man had not seen me when I knocked for admittance.

"It belongs to some English folks. It is in an agent's hands now."

"Thank you. I shall ask you some day to let me look through it, if you have the keys," I said sauvely, and leaving a piece of silver in his hand, departed full of consternation.

I drove at once to Mrs. Sidney's residence, for I knew Susy would be awaiting my arrival.

She opened the door for me radiant and lovely, and caressed me with shy coquetry. Sweet, childish, lovely Susy! For a moment all my fears vanished, and I believed myself the John Willoughby to whom she plighted her troth. It was only for a moment, however, for the accursed whispers assailed me even while my lips met hers, and I heard behind her gentle tones those piercing words: "Perjured, dishonored, forsworn!"

I listened mechanically to Susy's gay chatter, as



we decked the tree. I replied absently several times, to her amusement.

"I do not believe Harold is coming," she said, glancing at the clock, the hands of which pointed to nine.

"You expected him?" I inquired.

"Why, John! You know I asked him to come," she returned. "What ails you, Jack dear, that you are so forgetful? I do not believe you listen to one word I say," with a slight pout.

"Oh yes, I do, Susy mine. I went to see Harold the other day, and he did not speak of coming to-night. Perhaps he is also forgetful."

"So it seems," said Susy, struggling with a refractory candle that would not stand erect on the tree. "I wish he had not forgotten to come. His artistic instinct would never have permitted us to put that green trimming against the dark blue. It looks horridly, Jack."

"Oh, it will do," I replied carelessly, "the children will not be critical."

Our task was accomplished. The tree would be a marvel of delight to the children.

Susy leaning against me, nestled closer in my arms, and laid her golden head on my shoulder as she gazed upon its dazzling wonders.

"Jack dear," she said, "It does not seem possible that to-morrow I shall be your wife. Such a dear, quiet little wedding too, and my dress is so becoming, Jack. How long we have waited and planned our



future; the tea-set, the table-cover, and it is all come true. It is wonderful, isn't it, Jackey?"

For reply I pressed her hand to my lips.

"And don't you remember, Jack, it was only a short time ago, I made you promise to put all anxious thoughts aside. They only led you to be so eager and grasping for wealth. Papa says an avaricious, discontented spirit seldom attains what it most desires. I knew it would all come right without your anxiety. See how our wishes have been gratified, dear: Your salary raised, the stock paying well, and everything turning to our good. Oh! Jack, we should be so thankful."

Alas! every word cut me to the heart like a knife. My lies repeated by her lips, were as the words of an accusing angel.

"And Jack dearest," she continued softly, "I think it was because I prayed God to bless us according to his will. And if in the years to come, I should not prove all you think me—you are so much wiser and better in many ways than I am—you——"

"Oh, Susy, Susy!" I interrupted her, almost groaning.

"There," she said, with a tearful laugh, "I know all you would say! Don't say it, Jack, because I know better. But it is pleasant to feel how perfectly we understand each other. No secrets to discover; no unpleasant tempers to peep forth after marriage. Oh! I know you, Jack, like a book," shaking her finger in my face merrily. "You are naughty—and



cross sometimes, but—I love you!” and then she hid her face and its blushes against my breast.

In another moment she looked up as if suddenly recalling something.

“Oh! I have a surprise for you. Mamma said it would be charming, and would prepare you in a measure for to-morrow. I am sure we should regard your poor nerves and state of mind, John dear. I shall ask Harold to carry some *sal volatile*, in case you swoon during the ceremony. Now wait here and I will soon return.” She laughed merrily at her own nonsense and tripped from the room.

I paced the floor in sudden uncontrollable agony, keeping step to the sobbing ceaseless sound of those murmuring voices. Her innocent happiness only revealed my own dark conduct in its worst aspect. The veil of my determined resolution was being torn aside. Nearer and nearer I approached the truth and felt the real sense of my duplicity and the awful crime I was about to commit.

Great drops of perspiration stood upon my forehead. I trembled in every limb. What could I do? Throw myself at Susy's feet, confess my dishonor, and lose her forever? Oh—no—no—yet better a thousand times lose her than blast her tender life forever! Cheat *her* I might, but never again could I cheat myself into a peaceful knowledge of my own worthiness. I was already dead to honor and manliness, in that I permitted her sweet lips to touch mine, rendered foul by falsehood. Dead! Ay! as dead as



if the brown earth was heaped upon my breast and I lay stark and cold, hidden from her loving glance forever.

I heard the door open, and I turned to see Susy entering slowly. But ah! it was Susy in bridal raiment, the white folds falling about her slight form, while the veil covered her sweet rosy face like a soft mist.

The pearls, Harold's gift, gleamed upon her neck, and caught her veil among the golden tresses. She was like a beautiful poem, dreamed, yet unsung, and one that the poet would despair of finding a rhythm of words to express the wonder of her presence.

The sight of her thus smiling and blushing, awaiting my approval, the light of those dear eyes shining trustfully, seemed to blast me as an angel's might, and I made no step toward her, but stood dumbly gazing.

At the same moment the hall door opened, and I saw Janita Orme stand in the doorway, closely followed by my brother.

Susy did not see them. She stepped toward me quickly.

"John, you are ill," she said in terror. "You are like a ghost. I am sorry if I startled you."

"John," my brother's voice came in even tones of studied restraint, "this young woman says she has some business with you. I met her on my way hither, inquiring for you."



"I lost my way. He was most kind to direct me," broke in Janita, with her slight accent.

"I fear we intrude," said Harold, biting his lip between vexation, and the quick emotion excited by Susy's appearance. Susy turned at the sound of Harold's voice, looking startled and confused. A great crimson wave of indignation cast its signal to her forehead.

"If you will be kind enough to conduct the young woman to the study, Harold, Mr. Willoughby will see her there. You certainly have intruded."

She spoke with dignity, sweeping Harold with a keenly reproachful glance.

For a moment the women confronted each other, my wedded wife and my bride. The gray and black eyes met with a flash, and in the lightning of those glances I stood in silence. Then I heard Janita say slowly, struggling to make her English very clear:

"John, tell her who I am. I love you. I cannot keep my promise, because I did not then know my love. Now, I love you, better than you love all else in this world."

I still stood gazing in a dull way at her beautiful pleading face. I fancied I saw the pearls I had given her, gleaming under her black dress. I heard those voices, grown louder now, murmuring in a tumult of exaltation. Surely they must all hear them.

Susy's voice came to me from a long distance.

"John, my own love! Speak, tell me what this means."



"John!" But Janita checked my brother.

"I will tell you," she said slowly. "I see I love a coward, but oh! how I love him you can never know. He has saved me from misery, from the sin of hate. I am his wife!"

"It is false! John, speak, tell me it is false!" Harold's voice rose like a call for help as he strode toward me, but Janita, her beautiful face full of appeal, triumph, and love, cried:

"It is true—I am his wife before God, and before God I will swear it."

Susy stood for a moment like marble, then swayed and fell down at my feet, the lovely face set as in death. I bent over her in an agony of fear, crying out that she was dead, while the voices shrieked aloud until I heard again and again those words, "Perjured, Dishonored, Forsworn."

"John!" once more Harold cried imploringly. "Deny this; tell me this woman lies!"

"No, no!—I speak the truth as I live! Oh, do not cast me off. It is my only chance of escape. Even the Mother of Jesus forsakes me. Oh! that I might lie as that girl lies, loving him, but never to wake again!"

As Janita's voice fell upon my ear in these words, it seemed to mingle strangely with the jangle of those other words that had all day long assailed my confused brain.

I sprang toward her; I felt my hand press against her white throat, I saw her face grow ashen, her eyes



aghast; then I was whirled through space, and all grew dark and stifling until I felt something cold strike my face, and I knew I was lying face downward in the snow upon the street.

A long pause, during which only the darkness and cold seemed to haunt me, and then I heard voices far away.

“Move him this way. Do you feel his heart?”

The voice was full of misery. “For God’s sake, lift his head. Oh! what have I done? It cannot be that I have killed my brother!”

Then I heard no more. The gates of eternal darkness seemed to open, and I fell through endless space.



## CHAPTER VI.

“Thou turnest mine eyes into my very soul ;  
And there I see such black and grainèd spots,  
As will not leave their tinct.”

—*Hamlet.*

WHEN I next roused to consciousness, I was lying in my bed in my own lodgings, and the sun was shining dimly through the drawn curtains. At first I thought that all the occurrences of the night before were portions of a hideous nightmare. I had but spent a night in dreams since I had first gone to the house in Flatbush with my brother and Mr. Kennedy, and this was the awakening. I lifted my hand, and was surprised to find how heavy it seemed. I stirred uneasily, and moved my head on the pillow. A fierce pain shot across my temples, and I moaned a little. But I had learned enough from that slight effort to convince me how sternly real were all the incidents of the last scene my wandering senses sought to grasp. There across the room, her head bowed wearily on her arms, sat the girl I had married in the maddest mood and moment of my life. A dark shawl lay on a chair near her. My own watch ticked on the table near her, where it lay between two bottles of



medicine. As the moan escaped me, another figure rose, and, coming to the bedside, bent over me. Haggard and wan, the face restored the present with a bitter rush of recollection. It was my brother. One glance into his eyes, and I knew the depth of my shame, and felt the misery that was wounding his heart. I turned my face away and buried it from sight in the pillow.

"You know me, John?" he said, tremulously.

"Yes," I replied, and my voice sounded very weak.

"How long have I been here? and—like this?"

"Only two days. I have been in an agony of doubt. Can you forgive me, John? I—I—have nearly killed you."

"I wish you had," I muttered. "Leave me now, to my disgrace."

He turned away at my words, and motioned to Janita. She came forward with the medicine, but Harold took it from her, and she returned to her former attitude, while Harold gave me the draught. I drank obediently, but I kept my eyes fixed on his face. Relief was fast giving away to a settled sternness, that seemed to make him years older.

"John, can you follow me? I will speak clearly."

"I am listening. I am not sick. I cannot understand what has made me thus," I replied.

"I was guilty of the blow that has led to fever and delirium. I might have been a murderer, save for this girl. You must remember what caused my anger."



"Susy——" I began.

"Hush! no mention of her," he interposed, his eyes glowing. "But a moment ago you bade me leave you to your shame. You must feel, after all that has occurred, that I can no longer call you brother, nor feel for you the esteem and love of former years. All you can henceforth do is, by an honest life, to outlive the crying dishonor, the blot upon our hitherto unspotted name. How you can do this, burdened by the contemptible weakness your conduct involves, I know not. But we cannot meet as of old. Henceforth, I have no brother."

Every word fell like a blow on my burning heart. I saw how keen was his suffering as he uttered this knell to all my youthful hope and affection. Oh! Harold, in your clean shining manhood was there no pity for the soul writhing beneath those words, an outcast through a self-convicting deed?

I lifted myself with an effort to my elbow, and gazed upon him, then sank quietly back. But our eyes met in that brief, quick gaze, and I read no mercy, no hope in his glance. I had wounded the one dearer to him than I could ever be; transgressed every bond of faith and honor. Would to God his blow had sent my soul shuddering into the Hereafter. Better meet my God, sin-stained, than live to bear the scorching light of eyes that once looked love into mine.

He spoke in a low tone to Janita, and I saw her follow him to the door. Then I raised myself once more, and strove to speak.



"Harold," I called, but only in a hoarse whisper. "My brother, my darling Harold!"

No, no! Never again was he to hear the voice he was wont to welcome gladly. He was gone, and with a groaning sob I once more lost consciousness.

When I remembered anything again, it was midnight. A physician was just departing. Janita had moved to the bedside. I roused to feel her hand on my pulse. I asked for my brother, and she told me he had gone. Her tone was very gentle, almost soothing. I closed my eyes and feigned sleep, and saw that she, overcome by fatigue, really dropped asleep in her chair, her hand close to mine that any movement on my part might awaken her. But I did not move. I lay thinking, and what my thoughts were that terrible night, no man may know. I have known sorrow and anxiety, but God has been kind, in that I have never lived through such a night since. I was not hardened in sin. I had been led to this very act through some of the noblest aspirations in my nature. I had paid the heavy price of sin for the good gifts I longed to possess. I had all but added crime to my catalogue of evils, when the means of my temptation had saved me. This strange waif of whom I knew nothing; this half-woman, half-child who had presented every means to work out the evil in my grasping desires, rescued me, at the last. And henceforth I must call her wife. How I loathed the thought. To be forever reminded of the sinful folly, and have clinging to my life the hateful parasite of my temptation.



Yet had she not, even in that hour, when armed with a poignant weapon of revenge, refrained from revealing all my dishonor? No word had passed her lips, of the avarice that led to my accepting from her the treasure. She had only put forth her lawful claim and pleaded her love for me.

Toward morning I fell into a heavy sleep, and on rousing new life seemed to have entered into me. I rose, dressed myself, and went to the office. I felt very weak, but my head was clear, and I worked hard all day. No one questioned me at the office. A few of the clerks spoke of my marriage, but none of them knew whom I intended to wed, as I had never had many intimates, although I was a favorite in journalistic circles. Mr. Kennedy came to me in a few days. I saw at a glance that he knew much that had passed. He was distressed and openly lamented his part in taking me to Flatbush, and my infatuation with the girl.

I replied vaguely to his heart-broken questions. I would have been sullen under rebuke, but his genuine grief, full of fatherly affection, wrung my heart, and I only strove to acquaint him as little as possible with the detail of my dishonorable conduct. But I did not strive to exonerate myself. He told me that Susy was lying dangerously ill. I uttered no word of surprise or sorrow. Then he left me, promising to come on the morrow, and to bring me news of the sufferer. That night I spent pacing back and forth near the Sidney dwelling; and night after night found me there. I



would waylay the physician from his last visit at night, and again after his earliest call in the morning. Then numb with cold, and heavy with grief, I would snatch a few of the morning hours for sleep before I went to the office.

The physician knew me, and kept my secret, divining that I carried a heavier burden of suffering than that innocent victim whom he was guiding away from the shadow of death. He finally told me she would live. Mr. Kennedy came also full of gladness, to communicate the same tidings. He, dear old man, was the only link remaining to me with the world that once was mine. To him do I owe the grasp of a kindly hand, in the darkest hour of my life. All honor to the faith then, be it spiritualism or any other, that so keeps to the letter of Christ's teaching, that even a sinner may not perish for lack of the hand of fellowship. Oh, you, who are working among men, to convert and save; to bring about confession and conviction of sin; remember how much one good, true grasp of sincere friendliness will do, to save those whose feet stand in dangerous places. It is personal love and manliness that will win us, and Christ knew it before He trod the earth.

I plodded on in my hard way, and if I did not abandon Janita I certainly pursued a cruel and remorseless course with the girl. We lived in these small lodgings of mine; she always quietly unobtrusive, making the rooms neat and pursuing her small domestic duties faithfully. I left in the morning and



seldom returned until late at night. What the girl did with herself day after day, I knew not. I gave her money when she asked for it, but she only took enough for our slender meals. I did not note that she looked thin and worn. I often wished that she might be gone on my return, but she was always there patient and quiet, under my moroseness, for although I grew to enjoy the order of my home, I never gave the least sign of content or gratitude.

We seldom spoke to each other. In those days I even avoided looking at her. If my hand touched hers I shook it off. There was nothing that softened me towards her.

Thus the season dragged along. I plunged into business with vigor, burying the haunting thought in other cares. My concentration reaped its reward. My second speculation rivaled my first. I became a silent partner in the ownership of the paper. My pen was engaged in many projects. I entered with zest into politics, and my services were sought in the campaign. But I shunned any personal publicity. I shrank from seeing my name in huge printed letters; the name for which my brother must blush. My work was only the outgrowth of my misery; my prosperity seemed a mockery. I had never touched any of the treasure. It was deposited in the bank in a huge tin box, and I swore never to molest it.

I never saw my brother. Brooklyn was not large, but it was large enough for mutual avoidance between brothers.



During the summer I learned that my aunt was going abroad and would take Susy Sidney with her. Susy had never been very strong since her illness.

I was among the crowd on the wharf when the steamer sailed, and saw her leaning on Harold's arm, catching only one glimpse of the sweet, pale face with its aureola of golden hair. On my return to the lodgings that night I saw that Janita had been weeping violently, but I did not question her. Years afterward I learned that she was also on the wharf and had seen me there.

At this time I had not an impulse to drown my shame in drink. I cannot remember of ever drinking even to exhilaration, although this was at a time when every one used liquor freely. I only remember one desire that waged strong under my dogged moroseness. I wished to commit no other sin, and I felt remorse for all that I had done.

I was not penitent, but the effort to keep clean and clear from further evil showed the seeds of a true penitence which would follow later. But with Janita I was relentless. She was a portion of the evil clinging to my soul; the shadow on my threshold. Mr. Kennedy, always kind, urged me, as winter once more drew near, to live as I should, since I had ample means. He referred to Janita as not being permitted to suffer. Himself a devoted husband, he could not imagine my relations with the neglected, unloved woman I called my wife. I replied we were very comfortable. That Janita was doing very well. I think he felt the surly



reception of his advice, for I saw but little of him after that during the winter.

I was now fêted and lionized by the press, and courted by quite a coterie of fashionable people in Brooklyn and New York. But there was no danger of it turning my head, for when I came home I always found that the pale face of Janita was sufficient to keep my pride in check. If she had been a loathsome hag I could not have felt the burden of her presence more. She seemed to personify the memory of my transgression, and together with my surly remorse, to rend the vital portions of life's content.

One evening early in the spring, it was in April I think, for the buds were swelling and a balmy softness lingered in the air, I was unusually early in returning to my lodgings. An engagement had been postponed, and for the first time for months I found myself with an evening free of the bondage that had become my only existence. I was reluctant to return to the lodgings, and walked slowly. That evening, when we had finished our simple evening meal, Janita made to me her first protest since our unhappy marriage. She came to my side and begged me to remain with her; to forego any engagement I might have made. She spoke eagerly and with much agitation. I shook off her detaining hand and coldly replied that her request was ill-timed, that business was imperative, even if I desired to bear her company. Whereat she left the room sobbing in a broken-hearted manner that hurt me, despite my endeavor to stifle the emotion. Now



that I found myself unexpectedly free and able to comply with her request, I did not want to encounter her again so soon. Her white face and pitiful eyes haunted me, yet I feared she would think I had relented, and hence my return, and I would not have her think me inconsistent. As I walked listlessly along, I began painfully to go over the last months of my life, and every moment my ire rose bitterly against Janita.

Suddenly I found myself near the very church in which I was to have been married to Susy. I had never walked to my lodgings by this route since the nights I had watched under Susy's window in unutterable misery. The home of my cousin was but one street beyond. I had unconsciously followed the well-known way, to be brought face to face with still harsher memories. I was turning away with a curse for my folly, that all these months found me still the slave of a mood, when the sound of music from the church caught my ear. Children were singing Easter hymns, and I recalled many a former Easter-tide, for this was where I had been wont to sit with Susy, joining the hymns joyously. I had not been inside of a church for a year and a half, but the music touched me against my will, as Janita's sobs had done. I turned and entered. The church was dark within all save the organ loft, where the children gathered to practice the Easter hymns.

How well I remembered the quaint old church. From boyhood I had loved its rough walls and curious



little windows—the rude carving on the reading desk, the dim head of the Christ over the altar. Two emotions were contending within me. One that shook me with boyish, unshed tears; the other the iron grasp of my evil self, that scoffed at my weak agitation.

Three pews in advance of where I was sitting to-night I had sat Sunday after Sunday with Susy, thinking more of her than of the sermon, which was apt to be prosy.

Would to God I could kneel now as I had done then. I am sure God forgave me, when I knelt so that my head might lean nearer hers; forgave me, that human love brought me nearer his Divine love. But stop—*Did* this love of mine really draw me nearer to my Creator? Bah! cried the mocking spirit of my evil nature, what is God, that He permits such evils? A myth, a childish fetich, set up to lead us into superstition and folly.

“ Christ is risen from the dead,  
And lives again for us ;  
Glory to His Holy name,  
Who died and suffered thus.”

Thus sang the children cheerily. I rose to depart, when I paused, my attention was arrested by the entrance of a young man coming into the church as quietly as I had come.

Some one evidently was expecting the newcomer, for she left the group of children and came down the aisle to meet him. Even in the gloom of the dimly-



lighted church I saw the lovely face of my former sweetheart, and I knew that the tall form entering was my brother.

I sat down once more, my heart sinking, then throbbing wildly with passion.

She greeted him kindly, and he held her hand a minute lingeringly.

"The children are not quite ready to go yet, Harold; can you wait?"

Oh, the quality of that voice! Yet it lacked the soft mellow cadence of Janita's tones. Was it old memories that made it so alluring?

"I am in no hurry; but sit down here beside me. Let us listen together."

They sat just two pews ahead of me. Harold glanced toward me inquiringly, and I heard Susy say:

"Some one waiting like ourselves, to take the children home."

She looked blooming and bright as of yore. Involuntarily I compared her face with Janita's wan and worn visage, and the fiend contended more wildly than ever within my bosom.

I knelt and bowed my head on the next pew back of them, that I might be near enough to hear what they said.

Harold spoke in a low tone with a few glances my way. But I could hear all she said.

"Harold," she began after a pause, "I am going to make a request of you, to-night, that I feel will try you sorely. Dare I put you to the test?"



"I would hardly refuse you, Susy," he replied.

"Yet I have feared to ask it, all these weeks. But here to-night where we have all knelt as children, I may, I *must* have courage."

She faltered with almost a sob, and Harold laid his hand over hers to check her.

"No, I must go on," she continued. "I want to speak about—John."

My name! in the tone of one long since dead. Oh! that I lay dead, only a lovable memory to shake her with emotion. Better dead in Christ, loving her, than to have perished thus. I saw my brother give a quivering start.

"I beg you will spare me all mention of that name, Susy," he said, pleadingly.

"Harold, this is wrong. He is your brother. Many a time have I knelt between you in this church, and scarce knew which cousin was dearer to me. And shall I—oh! Harold, *can* I live to feel I have estranged you?"

"Susy, it is morbid folly on your part to talk thus. John's conduct estranged him from us all. Dishonored and disgraced, I cannot put my pride aside and forget. It is beyond the power of man to forgive such an injury, to *you*, even could I bring myself——"

"Stop a moment, Harold, and reflect. If *I* can forgive him, what right have you to such a memory? I have thought it out clearly, through days of sadness, and slow torturing nights. I could not have made him happy. I am so weak, so childish and foolish. I dare



not think how he did that thing. The awful pain of having so deceived those who loved him must have made his life a weary burden, full of sorrow. I dare not dwell on his motive. But, Harold, there is no anger in my heart for him. Only pity, and a longing to restore once more the relations between you, you who have always been to him his light of life. Harold, will you not go to him?"

My brother spoke with his head bowed in his hands. I failed to hear his reply. I was trembling lest one word of hers should escape me. Anger had been swept away at her first word. As weak as a child, I still knelt, listening.

"No, no, Harold," she said in reply to his murmured words. "You are mistaking ugly resentment and pride for my sake, as justifiable repugnance for his conduct. You see the world. I, dear friend, can only see the love that is necessary to save him from sadder measures. Ah! Harold, where is he to-night? Must you answer like Cain, 'Am I my brother's keeper'?"

Harold made a gesture of protest, but when he spoke I heard each word.

"Say no more, Susy. In my heart I am already branded with murder. I could have killed him that fatal night. We are neither of us worthy your pure, high regard. I will do as you say. Seek him out, and call him once more my brother. But henceforth I must be an exile from your presence."

"Oh, no," she protested in quick anxiety.

"How can you bear to have me near you? How can



I endure the thought of coming to you from the man who has heaped insult upon one of the fairest of God's creatures? Ah, no—no——”

“Harold! remember where you are,” she said gently, as his chest heaved and his voice grew intense. “Long ago I forgave John, and I believe to-night your resentment is more for the sin than the sinner. Have we never been tempted, Harold? I for one know how hard I prayed to die at one time, and to hate all that withheld me from him. But to-night I can say truthfully that forgiven and forgotten is all the error, as *I* hope to be forgiven. Will you not go to John and say it also?”

She bent forward, laying her small, gloved hand on his shoulder. He did not move for several moments, then I saw him press the hand in his, and she rose and went forward toward the chancel. With a very slight effort I could have touched him with my hand. My brother! the dearest and only blood tie on earth for me. Yet I could not move. I knelt dumb, save that from my heart a prayer for courage, for help was involuntarily going forth, while through and through my brain rushed the words of that sweet angel, whose garment I was not fit to touch.

“Forgiven all the error, as I hope to be forgiven.”

If the angels rejoice over a penitent sinner, what must be the pure exaltation of angels in the immortal victory that prompted these words. I did not raise my head as the children trooped out of the church. I knew Harold left the pew, and stood with Susy as she gath-



ered her brothers and other children around her. Then some one touched my shoulder. It was the sexton. I rose and followed the others from the church, carefully avoiding recognition.



## CHAPTER VII.

"Never by lapse of time  
The soul defaced by crime,  
Into its former self returns again ;  
For every guilty deed  
Holds in itself the seed  
Of retribution and undying pain."

—*Longfellow.*

I WALKED for a long time, I know not whither. I put my hand to my face and found tears there. A tempest seemed to have swept over me, and to have left me strangely at peace. I finally thought of Janita, and turned my steps toward the lodgings.

"Poor girl," I said and seemed to hear Susy's voice in the tone. My heart was almost light as I reached my rooms.

I entered the small living room—it was empty. My desk stood open as I was wont to leave it, but all was in perfect order. The lounge upon which I spent my restless nights was prepared for my return, and a glass of milk placed on the desk. I passed on to the little kitchen, where we took our meals. The kitchen clock ticked industriously, and the order bespoke Janita's care, but she was not there. I then returned to the first room, and as I crossed to enter the bedroom I saw on the desk a folded paper. I caught it up, and read in a faint scrawling hand:



"I am going away. I cannot live any longer. You will be free, but no one can love you better than Janita."

For a moment I was stunned. Like an awful vision rose the memory that I had almost prayed that this might happen. I pushed the bedroom door open, calling her name, in the vain hope that she might still be in the room. Then I started back, for she was there.

Motionless and lovely, white as marble, she was lying in a large armchair. For a moment I thought her dead. I went to her, in fear. A small fire burned on the hearth, for it was still cool in the evening, and in the flickering light I saw that she only slept. I put my hand upon her. Her clothing felt cold and damp, as if she had been in the night air. Bending lower I could see that her bosom rose and fell evenly, and while her face was tear-stained, she was sleeping peacefully as a child. Her hands were warm. She breathed easily. She had taken no narcotic. Her courage had failed her, at the last moment, thank God. I stood gazing upon her. Strange how sleep softens and changes the face, like the twin brother Death.

There was nothing in the lovely face before me that should have so roused the demon in me, at the glance of her eye, during the months of our miserable life together. The long dark lashes swept the white cheek, the curve of the lips was sad still with the thought that had caused her to sob herself to sleep. She held something crushed against her face, with the hand beneath



her cheek. It was an old soft felt hat of mine which I had worn on my first visit to Flatbush.

Was it possible she had worn it on the street? I glanced hastily over her garments. She wore the same old black dress I had always seen her wear. It was neatly mended in many places, but it was threadbare and shabby. One small foot appeared below the gown; the shoe was split, and I saw it was soaked through with water.

I felt the blood rush to my forehead. This was my wife. This pitiful, grief-stricken creature. A very child she seemed to me as she lay thus before me, every feature of her face and the very droop of her garment crying shame on me.

I bent down, laying one hand on her forehead gently. She did not stir.

"Janita!" I called softly, passing my hand over her dark hair.

She opened her eyes with a sobbing sigh, and, seeing me, started up wildly.

"Where am I? Oh! John—you here?"

Her tone, from bewilderment, to sudden shrinking timidity, was like a stab to my now sensitive heart.

"What does this mean, Janita?" I asked, laying a hand on her arm, as I held the paper toward her. She bit her lip at sight of it, and turned away.

"I was a coward," she whispered, hanging her head. "I went to—the water—but—it was so dark and cold. Oh! I begged you to stay with me to-night. I prayed that you might heed, but you left me. We cannot live



this way—one of us must go away. I would rather die than leave you. But the water—oh! I could not—I could not!” She shuddered and sobbed aloud.

In consternation I caught her in my arms, and saw then that she had stood in water almost to her knees. Her dress was very wet.

“Janita, my poor child! have I been so cruel as this? Try and stop sobbing and hear me. There is no reason for either of us going away. Will you not try and forgive the past, as I hope to mend the future?”

My words came awkwardly. I felt I was speaking from the letter of my resolution, not yet in the good spirit of the promise.

She looked at me wonderingly.

“Have you seen him?” she asked.

“Whom?” I stammered in surprise.

“I did not *dream* it?” she said, passing her hand over her forehead. “No, no, it is so,” and she snatched from the floor as she spoke a blue paper. It had evidently been about a small phial.

“See, it was chloroform. Enough to kill me,” she said softly. “When I had not courage to lie down in the water I thought of this and got it. I said I had the toothache and needed it. I came home here, and never meant to wake again.”

“Janita!”

“But he came—your brother.”

“My brother? How long ago?”

“I cannot tell. The night is so long,” she returned. “He wanted to see you, and he took the bottle from me



and threw it away. He talked to me kindly, oh! so kindly. I was almost happy when he left. But, oh! you would not be sorry." She ended with another sobbing moan, twisting herself out of my arms.

A thrill of despair seized me. I could not tell her I loved her.

"Janita," I began slowly. "It is true we cannot live as we have been living, but the change cannot be separation. We are man and wife and must remain thus. We both drag the chain of our mutual dishonor. You sinned to save yourself from an evil the nature of which I know not—I, for the gain of wealth and happiness. I have been a brute to you, but bear with me a little longer, and I will strive to wipe out the past by a better course. To-night I—have changed—I have been led——" I faltered. Could I bring myself to tell her what had passed? Ay! it was her due, and I recounted all that had occurred in the church. I must have pictured the scene graphically, for her face changed with every word, and when I had finished a strange glow seemed to light her dark eyes.

"Ah! the angel, she is so pure, so good—but she could not love as I do! She never——"

"Be silent," I interposed harshly, "nor dare to compare one emotion of our sinful natures with that lovely woman. We are unworthy to breathe the same air with her. You, who tempted me——"

Janita checked me suddenly, her eyes flaming:

"May Heaven be my judge," she said clearly, "'tis true I tempted you, but must I also bear the penalty of



your weakness? Had you not a man's strength to resist my plea? Had you loved me, the sin would not be so great. But you yielded, knowing the evil you wrought another. At least I love you, and am praying day by day to die, that I may no longer torment you."

"Janita, you are right," I said slowly. "I have been a cringing coward. I can only deserve your reproaches. But oh! help me, girl, help me, and I will do all a man can or may to blot out the past."

She put her hand in mine at once.

"I will help you, John. I will try, oh! how hard I will try, not to be in your way."

Her tears fell on our clasped hands, and I drew her to my bosom, and wiped the glittering drops from her eyes. And as I held her thus I realized what a child she was. Just sixteen as she told me later, Susan Sidney's junior by three years.

We talked late into the night, and I heard with a shudder, the history of Janita's life. She remembered no mother. She was born in Holland, but was soon taken to France by her father, whom she feared greatly. She had had three brothers. The father had taken the children from the mother, Janita learned later, because he was tired of her. Janita remembered a woman who beat her, and then she was put in a convent, where she remained six years. She was educated there, which accounted for her pure French and gentle manners. When twelve years of age, her father brought her from the convent, and with one brother took passage for America on a small sailing vessel.



They went to New Orleans, and then Janita's misery began. Her father's rough ways and strange habits distressed her. Her brothers ridiculed her, and forced strange acquaintances upon her. They finally came to New York, and then Janita learned for the first time that her father and brothers were professional counterfeiters. She was thrown into the company of thieves, and lived among people she loathed. She longed for the convent and the gentle sisters. She even made a vow to the Virgin to become a nun, if she would protect her.

"But I feared to wait," she added, with great naivete, "the good Marie was so slow, and when you came I thought only of marriage. For my brother wanted to marry me to one of his friends—the thought was horror! It was not right to go with you unless you married me, and then—I loved you!"

The treasure she said was hers. Her brother had said it was her dower, if she married his friend. I dared not ask whence came the treasure. I doubted her knowledge. She seemed content that it was hers, and so fully satisfied of this that she entirely overlooked the fact that she in turn had stolen it for me. For her brother would not have hesitated to have killed me had he known her intention regarding the money. The money had been hidden there by her father when they came to the old house as a refuge. Its reputation of being haunted made it for some time a safe lurking place. During their sojourn there, Janita had ventured to see the priest of the church nearest Flatbush. After



a time her father and brother returned one night, and told her that they must leave the city at once, and that she must follow that night as the wife of Giraldo, the Italian. Janita fled from the old house as soon as her father and brother departed, and searched until she found me. She walked the streets all that night and part of the next day. When she finally met Harold, she was faint and weary. She joyfully asked him of his brother. She did not know when she entered with him, that it was not my house. When she saw Susy, jealousy awoke and she no longer regarded her oath to me.

This was the story of her life up to the present. This was my wife, this strange child-woman, innocent in such strange inexplicable ways, yet full of a shrewdness that made one at times doubt her innocence. Was this owing to her contact with wickedness? Was the shadow upon her, yet not the wound that sears the soul? I could scarcely tell. Her sense of right and wrong seemed blunted. The enormity of her father's conduct seemed to weigh little beside the cruelty of his treatment of her. She was only a woman in her passionate love for me.

I sat silent when she had finished her narration. She watched me wistfully. I think she knew I suffered. Pride, fame, all bowed before the shame of this revelation. One after the other, I saw my ambitious dreams vanish, and felt the darkness of my future; my wife was to be a mill-stone about my neck. Dragging me back to humbleness, nay, to utter humiliation.



Janita was sitting close at my knee. She laid her face upon my hand, pressing her lips to it softly. I did not move, and presently I felt that she had fallen asleep.

For a while I watched the lovely face, and pictured the charm of her beauty to that scoundrel, to whom her brother would have married her. I wondered if his lips had ever touched those curved drooping lips of hers; if he had striven to woo her as men woo—and—I grew hot with anger. Bah! this creature my wife, this waif from a world unknown to me! I bent and lifted her lightly in my arms and laid her upon the bed. She opened her eyes and drowsily murmured my name in tones of love, then slept again like a worn-out child. And thus I left her, to pace the room and fight the battle alone. Alone, with my God, to face the bitter issue; to expect no sympathy or aid from living soul.



## CHAPTER VIII.

“ Try what repentance can ;  
What can it not ? ”

—*Hamlet.*

THE following day I went to my brother. I came away from his studio, full of courage and purpose. Every resolution of the night before was strengthened. Nor did I falter in at once carrying out my new plan of life.

Harold heard all I had to say with as much pain as it caused me in the relation. I did not strive to divulge the motive that led to the marriage with Janita. Something withheld this confession. I felt that in honor to the woman I married, I must not reveal the sordid, humiliating course I had pursued in wedding her. More than once, in my desire to lean on other strength than my own, I was wild to lay bare my very soul to my brother. But the remembrance of the real love the child bore me withheld me. God knows it was not through any desire to shield the depth of my own duplicity.

In my brother's presence I wrote a few words of gratitude to Susy for her goodness in pronouncing those words, that at least released me from the bondage of despondency and gave me hope to try and expiate my



former conduct. I would faithfully strive to be a better man, and upheld by the thought of her forgiveness I would seek that of my Heavenly Father.

As I finished the letter I said to Harold that I expected no recognition from my family; that I did not desire it. My wife was not my social equal, nor could I ever expect more than to be forgiven for my *mésalliance*. I could not recognize the possibility of any of the proud Willoughby blood receiving my little waif, with her doubtful pedigree. Harold sighed, but acquiesced in all I said.

"But *I* may come to see my brother," he said, clasping my hand. "Whatever else we may say, John, your wife is very beautiful. She will develop into a rare woman. I am not sure but that many will envy you yet."

"I doubt it," I replied, wincing, but I had carefully refrained from relating to him the story Janita had confided to me, regarding her father and brothers. I saw his artist's eye was gratified by her beauty, and a pride of possession, that quality that is inherent in every man, sprang into life at his words. Next to a man's passion for the woman of his choice, stands this pride of possession. I am not sure to-day that it is not paramount in many men to the divine fire that finds a woman fair only because he loves her. Beauty calls it forth, and many a beautiful woman has found the hearthstone cold and bare of all save this pride, that will not outlive the shadows wrought by sickness and care.



On leaving my brother, I set about at once securing a small house in a quiet street, where I could arrange a flower-garden if I wished during the summer.

Brooklyn, in 1830, was but a small town, as yet dependent on New York for her chief support. It would not surprise me if the next two or three generations succeed in placing a bridge across the river, and transporting facilities become much greater in this fashion. In the days of which I write I had little trouble in finding a small house, with pretty lawn and a few trees about it, at a moderate rent. In a few days it was cozily furnished. I had said nothing to Janita regarding a change. I spoke to her almost as little as formerly, but when I did so, it was with great gentleness.

My greatest difficulty was Janita's wardrobe. I had no idea what money she would need to procure suitable apparel, or how she could go about it herself, clad as she was. My embarrassment was extreme, as I had no love to prompt in me the tender intuition that aids almost every husband in such a dilemma.

One day, in great desperation, I went boldly into a shoe store and asked to look at ladies' shoes. The house was completely furnished, and I wished to take Janita that evening to see it. The clerk smilingly inquired what number of shoes I wished to buy. I flushed and stammered :

"No matter—oh, that is a number five, I presume."

He smiled again.

"Buying them for your mother? If so, and she is stout, a broad last will be——"



"No, I want them for my wife."

"Ah! is she large?"

"Yes—" I replied reluctantly—"not stout. Any pair will do, I guess."

"Not if she is like most ladies, sir. They mostly wants to put a number five foot in a number two shoe; now how's this?"

As he spoke he held up what seemed to me an absurdly small shoe.

"Too small," I said promptly, and after much thoughtful selection found a pair I thought might be right in point of size.

I then ventured to buy a shawl, and was even so bold as to enter a milliner's shop to look for a bonnet or hat. Here I was so overwhelmed with attention, spiced with that never failing womanly attribute, curiosity, that I beat a retreat, leaving the hat entirely to the milliner's taste, and she promised me, confidently, that I should not lose by putting my trust in her.

I found Janita busy over the supper when I came in with my purchases. She was singing softly, and as I entered she smiled a welcome, that never failed to touch me. It was so full of a devotion I so illy repaid.

"Janita," I began, awkwardly, "I have tried to get you a few things, I am sure you need. Some shoes—and—a shawl."

She came toward me with an odd expression that made me think she was going to weep. I busied myself over opening the bundle. As the shoes appeared she suddenly thrust out her foot, and instead of tears, after



one comical glance at me, she burst into a peal of silvery laughter that rang like music through the rooms. It gave me a curious thrill to hear it.

"Did you really think my foot was like that?" she cried. "Look, look at it!"

She pointed to her foot, that even in its old worn shoe was slender and dainty, and I saw my purchase was very much too large.

"Ah! you must go to the store yourself, Janita," I said, trying to join her mirth at my expense, and indeed her childish relish of the joke relieved me of the awkward situation. "The other shoes looked so very small. You are a real Cinderella, and I am unfortunate in not finding the right shoe."

"Yes, I had best get my own shoes. But what is Cinderella?"

"Only a little English fairy tale; I will tell you some day, if you are good. And I got you a shawl also, Janita."

This she pronounced an excellent selection, and then begged for the story again. So while we ate supper I told her, and she listened eagerly. When I was through the narration, she said:

"I wish I could have worn the shoes, John. Because you—got them."

"Oh, perhaps I can find an exact fit when I try again," I returned.

"And I am your Cinderella any way, John. Am I not always here in the chimney corner?" Then she added after a pause:



"Were you very poor, John, when I offered you the money?"

"I am not poor now, Janita," I replied evasively.

"Oh—of course not," she returned, and I shrank so from the subject that I could not bring myself to tell her that her ill-fated dower remained untouched in the bank.

"But, John," she continued, "can I have a little money? Then indeed you shall not be ashamed of me."

"All I have is yours, Janita," I replied.

But if her merriment was great over the shoes, she was vastly more amused by the hat I had purchased. She laughed until tears stood in her bright eyes, and so contagious was her mirth, and so absurd the hat, that I laughed also, as I had not laughed for months. But she thanked me gratefully.

"You did it to please me. It was kind, and I shall not forget. I forget nothing."

Later in the evening I told her of the house, and we went to inspect it. Janita could not express her content. She looked wistfully at me, and finally said:

"I am not a good girl. I did not keep my promise. You cannot love me. Yet you have patience and do so much. I cannot thank you, but I will try and obey you and make the home happy."

She always spoke slowly feeling her way, in the English language.

I replied in French:

"Let us not refer to this again, Janita. Whatever belongs to the past, let us bury with the past."



So we took possession of the little house, and Janita's happiness brought the nearest approach to peace my troubled days had known. Her fingers fashioned many pretty garments for herself, and her exquisite embroidery appeared in numberless devices to decorate the house. Her taste seemed never at fault, and her quick tact carried her over many trials, trials that I look back upon and wonder how she withstood them and came forth victorious. She knew nothing of life as I had been accustomed to living, yet by patience she schooled herself to every detail. Her education had been of the order usual in convents. She sang very well, and had been accustomed to singing in the chapel on festival days. She was quite devout in her adherence to the faith in which she had been reared, often quoting the Mother Superior of her convent, and more than often falling asleep with her rosary and crucifix pressed against her lips. I never questioned her, nor interfered with the faith that seemed to comfort her.

Once she came to me in some little trouble.

"I prayed the Virgin to help me, John, but I do not see how she can, it is so English!"

"And do you think the mother of Christ was French, Janita?" I asked, much amused.

"I cannot tell. But she helps me so little even though I pray in French!"

After this I tried gently to tell her of God the Father, and she listened attentively; still she repeated



her Aves, but confided to me later that she now prayed to both.

She often perplexed me; she was one moment all woman, at another a very child. But in one particular she ever put me to shame. No wish of mine fell unheeded upon her ear. At a word of disapproval, she relinquished at once any desire of her own. I felt more and more every day my lack of response to her affection. It awoke no chord of harmony within me. Often it wearied me, and at such times I kept away from home, professing business engagements.

At the close of the summer my brother, who had been abroad five months, returned, and came to call at our small establishment. I remember the occasion well, for I had for the first time in my married life brought a friend home to dine.

He was a young man quite prominent afterwards as a journalist, and I was not a little anxious that he should be impressed by my domestic felicity. He had himself frankly avowed a desire to see my wife. He said many of our comrades had told him I was very mysteriously married, having committed the act in haste, to repent at leisure. His cool assurance attained the end he had in view. I was nettled to think I had been discussed at the club, and I soon afterward invited him to dine with us. I said carelessly that we lived quietly, and that my wife was very young and inexperienced.

"I married a little French Mamzelle," I said, smiling, "and as she would quaintly use our English we



*'live small.'* But what has Dame Rumor said of us, Van?"

"It is hardly worthy repetition, Willoughby, yet all the stories were rough on you. Since they are false, let us not dwell upon them."

The day was lovely. A cool soft breeze blowing fleecy sunset clouds over a blue sky. Janita, clad in a soft white gown, awaited us, looking a picture of loveliness. Roses played hide-and-seek in her cheeks as she rose to greet our guest, but a pretty dignity was expressed in her word and gesture, and I saw my friend's surprise and pleasure, and knew what report he would make regarding my wife. The assurance awoke once more within me the pride of possession dear to a man's soul.

Janita had just given the signal for rising from the table, when the servant brought me a card. I sprang eagerly from the table.

"Janita, it is my brother Harold. Pardon me if I rush at once to greet him."

In a moment my hand was in his, and I explained Van Arsdell's presence, just as he and Janita entered. If I was nervous over the meeting of Harold and my wife, it vanished when she gave him her hand, and he bent and bestowed a kiss on her lips.

"That is a brother's prerogative," he said, laughing lightly, as she looked startled, "especially since I have been away so long."

"And one I should certainly claim promptly, were it in my jurisdiction," said Van, gaily.



"But in my country, in France, we only kiss our husbands," said Janita, a little gravely.

"And where did you live in France, may I ask?"

I saw Harold cast a quick, uneasy glance toward me, but Janita's reply was very simple.

"At the Convent St. Felice, twenty miles from Paris," she said, her eyes meeting mine reassuringly.

"My experience in Paris was not so favorable for gleaning the customs of the country," said Van, with a twinkle in his eye. "And did you learn so much of connubial propriety in the convent, Mrs. Willoughby?"

"The girls *will* talk of sweethearts, even when the sisters forbid it. I was not more obedient than the others," she returned gravely, and then turning to Harold, she asked him where he had spent the summer.

The conversation drifted to other matters, and Janita having occasion to withdraw, Van Arsdell broke forth enthusiastically.

"By Jove, Willoughby, I see through you now, you sly dog. Jealous of your lovely wife, eh? Come, own it at once. But don't you know, man, she would make a tremendous sensation? She will become the fashion of the hour, if you will only introduce her socially. She is superb, and with your influence and reputation——"

"Pardon me, Van," I said coldly, "my wife does not become a part of my public reputation. Nor do I wish to use her as an advertisement sheet."



"I see you are determined to keep her rare loveliness hidden from view. But it is not right. Mr. Wilmoughby," turning to Harold, "you must see how wrong it is to permit such scandalous tales to circulate through the club. By Heaven, it is an insult to such a glorious creature to behave as if you were ashamed of her!"

And with his peculiar frankness, he told us in plain terms the reports circulated about my marriage. Harold twisted in his chair and looked as if the mere repetition insulted him. I felt my ire rising, but controlled myself, as I tried to feel Van Arsdell was telling all this, as far as he could see, for my own good. When he was through I thanked him briefly, and hoped he would hereafter contradict such reports. There was tacit rebuke in my tone, at his bad taste in speaking of such matters at my own table, and Van saw and accepted the reproof at once.

Upon Janita's return she sang for us, and then Harold joined his voice to hers, and Van and I listened with great pleasure, openly expressed on Van's side.

Harold lingered quite late, talking with me. We referred little to the past. He told me my wife was a constant delight for the eye to dwell upon.

"She is all I can desire," I said stiffly.

"And you are happy, John? I see a change in your bearing, more serenity in your glance. Surely——"

"Harold, I am content, better content than when you saw me last. Happiness I laid aside with my youth and its follies."



"Nonsense, John. You are but five years my senior, and——"

"And you are happy, I presume?"

His eyes fell before my glance.

"There is but one thing can make me so, John, and that will never happen," he replied.

"Where—is she?" I asked slowly.

"In Italy with Aunt Milly. I came away. I could not stay longer."

"I am sorry, Harold," I said, brokenly, and we clasped hands and parted.

After this it was impossible to lead our quiet life. Harold brought friends with him to the house; Van also introduced a few of his associates. In a short time Janita was enjoying a taste of popularity that would have served to turn an older head than hers. But she bore it all with delightful unconsciousness of the homage paid her beauty. She was very happy, and enjoyed each moment. But there was no shadow of coquetry in her pretty manner, and she referred to me in a way that would have been very flattering had I felt as a husband should toward the wife of his choice.

I think I betrayed how closely I watched my wife to my brother, for he said to me one day:

"John, you may know more than I do of Janita, but if you are not jealous you are unjust. She is the soul of purity. I find her more delightfully charming every day. How came she in the old Hall? What do you know of her antecedents? There! I beg pardon,



John, I have touched upon an old wound. Do not answer me."

"In truth, Harold, I would rather not enter into details. That she is a pure woman, there is no doubt. I only feared so much admiration would turn her head."

"That pretty head is too well poised for that," said Harold. "She is as demure under compliment as an old soldier under fire. You remember that old beau, Fred Burns? Last night he paid her a very florid compliment. You, as usual, were engrossed in politics. Janita looked at the old fool graciously, and said, 'Sir, you are very kind.' Then she added in a low voice, to me in French, 'But how he lies, Harold, how he lies!' I was convulsed with mirth at her tone, but she never smiled."

"She is a curious creature," I returned.

But despite reluctance on my part, we soon became the fashion, as Van Arsdell had predicted, and the stories of my marriage grew from obscure hints of a *mésalliance* to the wildest reports of Janita's birth and parentage. Mr. Kennedy was radiant whenever I chanced to meet him. He was still turning over my money, and now that my mysterious marriage appeared such a prosperous one, he was ready to congratulate himself upon having taken me to Axtell Hall that fateful night.

Something akin to happiness often swept over me during these days, when I saw that Janita brought me peace and even prestige, but it was the worldly-com-



fort, which is so often forced upon us in lieu of that higher, holier law of earth-love. I worked hard to place far from me any possibility of touching that treasure which I had grown to abhor. As my wife, and a devoted and true woman, I had learned to reverence Janita, and I longed to give her every worldly gratification possible.

She seemed very happy, and demanded little of me beyond a smile of indulgence or a word of praise, but I found myself wishing she would exact more of me.

In the spring my aunt and Susy returned, and Harold came less frequently to our house. Janita missed him sadly. She was always so merry with Harold that I began to miss their cheerful mirth also, and I exerted myself somewhat to divert her. We spent our evenings more together, as I was reluctant to have Janita in our social world without Harold's care, and I unconsciously fell into the habit of coming home earlier, because I knew it pleased her.

As we advanced into a successful social life, we found another world—a new world of our own, and before the summer was over I suddenly became conscious that love held me in a bond I had no desire to loosen. I did not analyze my newly-acquired content. Life grew bright and full of hope, and as there was no acknowledgment in words of the happiness that was ours, I supposed that Janita had accepted as tacitly as I had the flood of sunshine that the future seemed to hold for us. But how little we men fathom a woman's heart.



With the consciousness of another life intrusted to her, came the truthful revelation of all that her marriage had been. The childishness that was so charming passed from her. She grew pale and wistful, drooping like a flower, shrinking even from my tenderness. I knew she often spent hours in weeping, although she thought she had successfully concealed all traces of tears from me. I grew anxious about her and called in a physician. He commended a change of air at once, and filled me with consternation by giving me advice as to securing cheerful companionship of her own sex for my wife. "Send for your cousin, or aunt, or some cheerful body to liven her up, my dear sir, or you'll have your wife seriously ill, and your babe still-born."

His words came upon me like a sharp blow between the eyes. Change of air meant separation, for I could not at that time leave my office, and to think of home without Janita wrung my heart. Then how helpless I was to obey the physician's second piece of advice. I talked to Janita, however, as if the change must be made at once, for I feared if I showed my reluctance to part with her she would refuse to go, and thus imperil her life and that of our child.

She heard the physician's verdict passively, and made little comment. Her silence made me long to wring from her some expression of regret, such as I felt, that we should have to be parted even for the matter of a few weeks, but I dared not agitate her.

Harold had been settling Aunt Mildred and Susy



in a healthful summer resort, and he found a place not far distant for Janita. Every day, as I learned later, Susy and Janita saw each other during the summer. Susy touched by the wan face, yearning to speak to Janita. Janita suffering and longing for comfort. But neither dared make the first advances.

I made several trips to see Janita, but never encountered my relatives. Janita returned in the autumn, stronger, but very quiet and unlike her former self. Her pretty display of affection for me had ceased. She was grateful for all that was done for her, but she had lost her demonstrative manner.

I sorely missed her gay spirit, and was consequently very tender and careful of her slightest wish.

In December our babe was born. On the anniversary of the day I married Janita, the second year, my only son, John Harold Willoughby, was born, and God alone knows the mingled awe and joy in my heart as I held him for the first time in my arms. Would the sins of the father be visited upon this child?

It was my first and awful thought, as the past arose to confront me. And then the memory of his mercy came upon me, and I felt that I could but trust in his will.

And Janita? She was very happy in her motherhood, but all her caresses were now lavished upon the boy. I found myself longing for a return of her pretty demonstrative ways I was wont to avoid and ignore. But I was too proud to speak to her on the subject, and



I told myself that a desire to spare her any pain withheld me from complaining of this change in her. I see now the indomitable pride and shame that kept me silent.

About three months after the babe was born I returned home earlier than usual. I had grown accustomed to going at once to the nursery where I usually found Janita sitting with Harold in her arms, the picture of happy motherhood.

I was proceeding up-stairs lightly, when the sound of voices made me pause and lean against the banister in sudden agitation.

"I have long wanted to come to you," I heard in the tones that had pleaded in the church with my brother. "My heart has yearned toward you ever since last summer——"

"Hush, dear, all that is forgotten. Look at the darling in your lap, and know that as you love *him*, I speak the truth when I say that I do not regret the past. I have lived to learn more and more of my own heart, Janita, and I am very happy and content."

"You are so good. I can never be like you. Oh! can you not teach me the way to make him love me?"

"Janita, how can you doubt his love? Did he not give up all to marry you? This little child should teach you both forbearance, if you have not peace. I am so glad you call him John. How do you say it so prettily—Jan? He seems named for you both. Ah! see, your tears have fallen on his sweet wee face. Shall Aunt Susy kiss them quite away?"



I crept softly down-stairs again as they bent over the babe. Every pulse within me that had risen in sudden riot at the sound of Susy's voice, calmed to peace, as I felt myself an outcast even in this circle of love, thrown like a halo about the person of the woman I had ruthlessly sacrificed.

I felt Susy's avowal of content, meant her love for Harold, and yet I shrank at the thought as if guilty of sacrilege. If she loved my brother it was still her own sweet secret.

When I heard them on the stairs I came from the library. Susy flushed crimson, but her eyes met mine calmly as she put her hand out and greeted me frankly. Janita was very pale, and I felt her eyes upon me, watchfully.

"You have seen my son, Susy?" I asked as if we had parted yesterday.

"I came to see him, John. He is in every way a worthy Willoughby. I trust I may come and see him often?"

"Your welcome is a foregone conclusion. How is Aunt Mildred?"

"Not very well this season. I presume Harold has told you that she has purchased the old Axtell Place in Flatbush?"

"No," I said, trying to speak naturally, while I saw Janita's fingers tighten on the banister. "It is a fine quaint old place, and you will enjoy it, Susy."

"I think I shall. Harold does not seem as pleased as I thought he would be, and opposed aunty, and al-



most made a scene for himself, but she has quite won him over. But I must go. Auntie does not know where I am, and I dare not tell her. Good-by. I wish you would come and see me, Janita, for I must bore you by making all the visits. No, John, the carriage is not waiting. I ran away from auntie."

And after kissing Janita, she vanished like a sun-beam, and left us in the shadow. Janita stood leaning against a chair, her eyes drooping, her face pale.

Suddenly she raise her eyes and they met mine.

"I could not be like her," she said, in a stifled tone.

"I could not love any one as she has. I am——"

"Janita," I said, laying my hand on her shoulder, "you are my wife, the mother of my child. I am content."

She turned upon me a long gaze, then went up the stairway. But I saw her head was bowed and she wept bitterly,



## CHAPTER IX.

“ Man !

Thou pendulum twixt a smile and tear.”

—*Byron.*

ALL of that summer we saw a great deal of Harold and Susy. They would slip away from the house in Flatbush and come to us, bringing a great deal of pleasure into our quiet lives. It was easy to perceive how Harold's love affair was progressing.

My aunt had furnished Axtell Hall very handsomely, and was enjoying her purchase with her usual zest. Susy's rapture over the old house met with little response from us.

To my surprise Janita seemed less moved by the constant references to the house than either Harold or myself. She seemed to think of little else than her baby, and Harold's frankly expressed aversion for his new home, at first surprised her.

“ Harold was very foolish,” said Susy, laughing. “ Aunty got so vexed with him that she secured the house at once when she found he opposed her. You know she dislikes opposition.”

Susy was holding my small son as she spoke, and she glanced merrily over his head at Harold. Harold bit his mustache in silence, and I said :



"Arbitrary as ever!"

"That trait waxes stronger with increasing years," said Harold. "I think she would have enjoyed putting me in the haunted chamber, had there been any egress or entrance save through a window. It would have been a just punishment for my sin of opposition."

"John, just fancy it! A room to which we can find no entrance. I am so eager to explore, and reveal a hidden stairway. They tell strange, blood-curdling tales about old Col. Axtell. I really often think that I see ghosts when I go through the hall."

"Do you believe in ghosts?" asked Janita, who was very courageous.

"No—only those of the past that rise occasionally to confront us," she returned lightly, as she kissed Jan and relinquished him to his mother. Then she looked up and saw something in Harold's face and mine, and she flushed painfully. Janita diverted the train of thought, however, being quite oblivious of Susy's reply.

"I think Jan has a tooth," she said, prosaically, and in a moment Susy was eagerly investigating the baby's little mouth.

It was just at this time that I happened one day to be at Harold's studio as he was being introduced to a very prepossessing stranger, and shared in the introduction. Our old friend Van Arsdell had brought the man in. A tall, dark-eyed man, with a closely-trimmed black beard, and well-cut features. At first glance there was something startlingly familiar in his face,



but in a few moments I was quite convinced I had never had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Wallace Barney before. He was a bright, good-natured fellow, and after this I met him often with Harold, and they finally went away in the autumn together for a month's shooting.

Time passed swiftly, and in the easy comfort of our household I almost forgot the treasure that lay concealed in the bank vaults, or, if I thought of it at all, it was to resolve at some future time to transform it into some good that would redeem it from the stigma under which it rested. We led busy lives. Janita was a favorite in our small circle, mainly composed of artists and those engaged in literary careers. We had little to do with the more aristocratic fashionable coterie to which my aunt belonged, and in which Susy was obliged to aid her in her social duties. Harold's artistic bent made him one of our circle as well, and frequently Susy was his companion. She wore a diamond ring on her left hand, although she never vouchsafed any confidence about it, even when with Janita.

Our boy was nearly two years old when the first circumstance occurred to break in upon our established peace. Janita and Harold had always been the best of friends, their good fellowship causing me at times a remorseful sigh. Harold seemed to understand the child-woman as I could not hope to understand her. Alas! I had even grown accustomed to her performance of every wifely duty, without the charm of caress or demonstration of affection.



For some time Harold and Janita had had a charming secret between them. I had teased Janita a little, but when Jan's picture was given to me on my birthday, the portrait beautifully executed by Harold, I looked upon it as the result of the mysterious secret, and gave no more thought to the matter.

One evening we were to attend a large dinner, given by one of my fellow editors, when a violent storm arose, and the rain fell in such torrents that I decided to remain at home. Janita did not appear at all disappointed, but was quite bright and talkative during the dinner hour. After dinner I played with the boy for some time, glad of the opportunity to romp with him. He was in a gale of pleasure that night, as I danced him on my knee, or swung him to my shoulder. Then as a grand finale, before sending him to bed, I carried him to where his mother stood leaning against the mantel, and bent until he caught his arm about her neck. She kissed him laughingly, and his little hand snatched at the pearls she wore on her neck, for she was dressed to go with me to the dinner. Then the little rogue suddenly drew our heads together with an arm around each, and in a moment I had pressed my lips to Janita, in a warm caress, that reminded me of the first kiss I had given her so long ago in the haunted chamber. Jan insisted on linking us with his little arms, so I passed my arm about Janita, and we went thus as far as the foot of the stairs; then I carried the child to the nursery.

On my return Janita stood once more by the mantel.



The evening was cool, and I had ordered a wood fire made on the hearth. Janita was clad in black velvet, falling about her in graceful folds. She held one hand against the pearls at her throat, as she stood evidently in grave thought, tapping one little black satin slipper that peeped out below her gown. I hated the sight of those pearls, but had grown accustomed to see her wear them.

I went up to her gaily. I was very light-hearted to-night.

"I am not sorry for the storm," I said. "We will have no callers, and an evening at home with one's wife is a rare boon. Janita, we are too popular. I never see you alone any more."

"Do you wish it?" she asked, a little languor in the tone that was not natural.

"With all my heart," I replied. "I am negotiating for a desert island for the ensuing summer. I shall place you and Jan upon it, and alone enjoy its privileges."

"Does it still rain?" she asked listlessly.

"Yes. You were not disappointed about the dinner, Nita? I confess I felt a sense of relief in being home."

"No—oh, no. I am glad to be home. I only wondered if——"

"Well!" I said, as she hesitated.

"No matter," she replied. "The wood fire is very pleasant."

I watched her a few moments as she stood turned slightly from me, then I went to her, and gently un-



fastened the clasp of the pearl necklace and kissed the warm white throat and neck, holding the pearls concealed in my hand.

She looked surprised, then leaned against me, her lips quivering a little.

"Why do you take my pearls?"

"Do not wear them any more, Janita," I said coaxingly; "your throat is too soft and fair to need their luster. Promise me to give them up."

"Oh! this was what you wanted," she said, drawing away from me a little. "I cannot promise never to wear them. Harold says they are the most becoming jewel a woman can wear. On one condition I will put them aside for a time."

"And the condition, Janita?" I asked, drawing her to me once more, and feeling a strange thrill of novelty in thus making love to my wife.

"I have delayed asking you so long, that I know I have been foolishly timid," she began. "Next week, on Thursday, Harold has planned to have a small reception at his studio. Just a few of the M. C. C.," mentioning a coterie of artists famous among us socially. "I am to have a toilette of white satin. Now can you not guess my dilemma, and my request?"

She looked up at me with a radiant, brilliant glance, quite confident of my ready compliance.

"Money, and a great deal of it," I said conclusively, but in secret disappointment. I really hoped she would make a request requiring some sacrifice on my part. I was really eager to show her my devotion.



"No, I do not want money, John. I want the rubies from the treasure box. Harold says rubies alone will complete the toilette, and—I want them—John—they are mine!"

"Janita!" my voice was full of astonished displeasure. We drew apart, and she crossed the room, saying petulantly:

"There! I might have known you would refuse me. Of course, I know you must have used much of the treasure, but I hardly thought you would dispose of the jewels——"

"Stop," I cried, and then the words seemed to choke me. I closed the door into the hall, that the servants should not hear, and then I said slowly and sternly:

"Is it possible that you have thought that I touched any part of that money? The wages of my soul, of my honor! Have you no conception of what these years have been to me? I scarcely know whether to attribute ignorance as the cause of your present request, or to conclude that you really have no conscience, and that I have been wholly mistaken——"

I checked myself, for Janita's face had turned white to the lips, and she stood shivering.

"Never touched the money, or the jewels?" she asked wonderingly. "Why not? It was mine. He gave it to me. It was all I had to give you. All I could bestow of comfort in our loveless life. What do you mean? If you have used none of this money, how do I come to have this home? How can I dress thus? Speak, John, tell me quickly."



It was too true. I had never told her of my resolve regarding the treasure. I had never explained to her any feeling I had in the matter. Knowing her strange childish nature, I had trusted to the instinctive sense of right and wrong becoming so developed in her that she would readily understand the position in which I was placed. But I did not understand my wife yet, nor had I made allowance for a sense lacking in her. Only recently had I roused myself to the pleasure of my wife's companionship. Oh! what a senseless fool I had been.

"Janita," I said, still sternly, as a gathering realization of my own shortcomings, as husband and guide, was borne in upon me, "no luxury we enjoy was procured with that wretched money. I have worked to give you all this comfort. I would starve rather than use what you have told me is the plunder of thieves. Pardon me, my wife, I know I hurt you, but your own words have so named it. My soul revolted at the thought of using this money. I did not intend to deceive you. You never asked me before about the fate of the strong box. It lies at the bank as unmolested as the day I placed it there, and neither my hand, nor any hand of my blood, shall ever touch a piece of money or the jewels contained therein."

She looked at me as if I had struck her, then sank into a chair with a moan, and crouched there.

"I brought you nothing, then—nothing!" she murmured. "I thought I had at least brought you com-



fort and luxury, if I could not bring you happiness. You have spurned it all."

"Janita, my child, let us have no more of this. Meet the truth squarely, and there will be an end to tears and regret. It is true that at one time I lost all sense of honor, but the years you have spent with me since must have taught you how much dearer than wealth is my name and conscience. We could not touch this money and not feel degraded to the level of common thieves. Your proposition to wear the jewels has startled me beyond measure. It has called forth that ghost of unrighteousness in my past that I have striven to live down. Heaven knows that I yielded once to temptation, but I have striven since to expiate the curse of that weak moment——"

"Nay! it is I that have been your curse," she cried, suddenly lifting her head. "And when I thought I pleased you most, you have remembered all that cruel wrong, I could not prevent. I have even given you a child, tainted with the blood of thieves. Oh! why did you not let me slip away and die before I lived to hear you say these words? I never even guessed the wrong. I—I am so ignorant—and no one tells me. I thought you accepted all I had to give. I see now. I understand. I have been awakening slowly, ever since my baby came. It must be true, as Harold said last——"

"Stop, Janita, what has Harold said? What right have you to discuss our relations with him? Answer me at once."

I laid no gentle hand on her arm, for I was throb-



bing in every pulse, with the old unreasonable anger. How dared my brother speak to my wife on a subject which she never broached with me. She turned a frightened, pleading face to mine, and at that moment our small maid pushed the door open, and entered with two cards upon a tray.

Janita recovered herself quickly as I handed her the cards. They bore the names of Harold and his friend, Mr. Wallace Barney.

"Show them up, Tessa," I said; then, as the girl disappeared, I turned to Janita, saying hurriedly:

"We have misunderstood each other once more. Forgive me if I seemed harsh. But, Janita, wife, in Heaven's name, let no one, not even my brother, share your confidence, or discuss with you the bond that should be sacred, be it ever so hateful to one, or both. By the love we both bear the child I conjure you to remember this."

She bowed her head, her lips quivering painfully, and made no reply. Harold entered, with his usual debonaire manner, delighted at having escaped a reception that promised to be a bore. I was surprised at his bringing Mr. Barney to call, for I had not invited him to do so, and Harold knew that I was very particular as to who came to my house in this familiar manner.

Janita started nervously when Mr. Barney's voice fell on her ear. A mellow, pleasant voice, with just a faint suspicion of a foreign accent. She turned upon him a quick puzzled glance, then took up her rôle of



hostess, and played it to perfection as usual. It fell out quite naturally that I talked with Mr. Barney, while Harold and Janita, after singing together, remained tête-à-tête at the piano. Harold stood with his back to me, completely concealing Janita, and I could only hear the murmur of their voices. For some reason I was vexed to-night by Harold's perfect understanding and evident enjoyment of my wife's companionship. I had heard, in a general way, that Mr. Barney's life had been a varied one. That he was a thorough man of the world was betrayed by every quick jest and clever anecdote, and once I was recalled suddenly from wandering attention to his words by seeing that he recognized my vigilance toward the couple at the piano.

He was much interested in a collection of coins I owned, and showed a keen knowledge of their value. He spoke in a careless way also of my aunt's recent purchase of the Axtell place, and showed a familiarity with all my brother's affairs that aroused in me a sudden feeling of distrust, although I could not help liking the man.

When they departed the rain was over, and I decided to go meet an imaginary engagement, to avoid further conversation with Janita that night. I felt that I must have time to think and contend with this new emotion. Could it be possible that I was jealous of my wife? "No," I said. "But I am anxious that she should guard the name she bears against a shadow of dishonor. This anger of mine is nothing more."



When I returned that night she had retired and was asleep with Jan in the nursery, her face pressed against his baby fairness. I gazed at them for some time; then, laying the pearl necklace, still in my possession, upon Janita's table, I stole away, feeling more unhappy than I had felt for days.

For some reason which I could not define, we avoided each other for a few days, and the experience of the old days in the cramped lodgings seemed about to be repeated. Janita looked sad and wistful.

Susy came in to call on Wednesday and found us at luncheon. She was quick to see the alteration in Janita, and said Nita needed a change of air.

"A new world, Susy, perhaps Heaven if I am good enough," Janita replied with such bitter listlessness that I saw Susy's quick start of surprise. Her glance sought mine at once, and I could not meet it frankly. She chatted on, however, touching upon the reception Harold was about to give at his studio, and finally upon Mr. Barney, Harold's latest friend.

"I do not like him," she said shortly. "I cannot tell you why, but I cannot trust him. He pries into one's affairs so. Harold is perfectly infatuated; we almost quarreled about him last night. What did you think of him, Nita?"

"I do not think that I bestowed a thought upon him. He seemed like other men, only with exaggerated whiskers. I dislike dark men exceedingly."

"Oh!" cried Susy, then checked herself as I shook



my head a little mischievously and pointed to a picture of Harold hanging on the wall.

"Yet this Mr. Barney did remind me of something very disagreeable when I first heard him speak. But the feeling passed away," added Janita, musingly. "He reminded me—of—of—oh! yes!" she stopped abruptly, a burning crimson swept to her very forehead, and, bending over little Jan, she sedulously prepared his food, and avoided looking toward me again.

"You are going to the reception at the studio, of course," said Susy, hastily changing the subject.

"I presume we are. We have cards," I said, smiling.

"Oh! you must not refuse, for Harold is to unveil the picture he has painted for the next exhibition, and it would break his heart to have you absent."

"We will not disappoint Harold," said Janita, conclusively, and then I arose and left them to talk over the details of the affair.

That afternoon I had occasion to go to Harold's studio. Mr. Kennedy had advised me about some investments of Harold's, and I hastened to warn my brother of the danger of the speculation.

As I entered the building wherein Harold had lodgings as well as his studio, I met Mr. Barney and my old friend, Van Arsdell. I saw at once that Van was under the influence of liquor, but I had to pause since he addressed himself to me.

"Goin' up, eh! old boy? After your wife, eh? that is right—look sharp after beautiful wife, eh?"



Barney gave me a quick glance, and smiled suavely.

"Our friend is a little elevated, and the sight of your wife has more than pleased him. You will find her above," he said.

"For Heaven's sake get him off of the street," I said, shocked at Van's condition.

"No—would rather go with you, my boy. Find pretty wife, give Harold the devil," with a drunken leer at me.

I turned away in disgust, leaving Barney to deal with him, while I hurried to Harold's studio, vexed and startled by Barney's corroborating Van's drunken statement regarding my wife's presence there.

I was delayed by Harold's small errand boy in the ante-room.

"Mr. Willoughby was not to be disturbed except on particular business."

I said I must see him at once, and after a few moments I was admitted. Harold met me with a glance of surprise and welcome, and said:

"Why, old man, you seem disturbed. In no trouble I hope?"

I made some reference to my meeting with Van, but did not repeat his words. I felt a sudden shame for my suspicion under Harold's frank gaze.

As I turned to depart after stating my errand I stooped and picked up a woman's glove, exhaling a faint odor of violets.

"Harold," I said coldly, "my wife has been here? Is she here now? This is her glove."



For the first time in years Harold's eyes fell beneath my steady gaze. He started to speak twice and failed. Then a slight noise occurred behind me, and Janita came forth from a curtained alcove.

She came toward me calmly, showing no consciousness of anything save of having been discovered.

"I must have dropped it," she said, taking the glove from me. "I am glad not to lose it. I dislike odd gloves. And you have found me here at last. But our secret is safe, Harold. Do not look so downcast. I can walk home with you, John."

I bit my lip in silence. I dared not speak. Harold turned from us both, and, dashing his palette from him with an exclamation, walked to the window.

"What have I done?" asked Janita, in a trembling voice. "John, are you angry? Have I done wrong? Speak to me, do not look like that! Harold, why do you turn away? We meant no harm. Tell him, Harold, tell him how we——"

"I wish to know nothing—nothing. Janita, my poor wife, I have no reproach for you. Put on your bonnet and return with me. I trusted my brother, but see that he has taken advantage of the sweet confidence of my wife, to further his ends. And I hear from drunken fools of clandestine meetings, and learn my blind folly and his petty revenge. Janita, do not delay, get ready to go with me at once."

"John—John, you are angry with Harold; oh! do not, do not——"

"Hold! Janita, dear sister, say no more," said Har-



old, turning toward us as he spoke. "I have been imprudent, unwise, if you will, but John misjudges me, as he must ever misjudge me, in his present angry mood. Janita knows what motive brought her here, and whoever has spied upon us has had no cause for——"

"This is true, John," said Janita; "you will know our secret so soon now. I entreat you not to quarrel with one another because I have done wrong. I know that I have transgressed some law, but believe me I have done so innocently and from ignorance. Harold, let me tell John now why I came here—please——"

"Janita," said Harold proudly, "I demand that John shall make no further inquiry. He has misjudged me and has no kindness in his heart for me. But I can wait until he is ready to do me justice. Until then we must part."

All the pride of the Willoughbys could not veil the grief in Harold's eyes or still the raging in my heart as I led Janita away. I constrained myself on the way home to tell Janita as gently as possible what construction might be placed upon her visit to Harold's studio. I told her the comment I had heard. She shrank back appalled at the thought.

"I meant no wrong, John," she pleaded.

"I know this, Janita; I feel it. You have never given me cause to doubt your truth. But Harold, whom I trusted, who has always been your kindest shield, and closest friend, even when you knew it not, for him to have forgotten—nay! he could not forget—he seeks to affront me!"



"Oh, John, no—no!"

"Listen, Janita. I ask you no questions. Keep your word with Harold now, since you are pledged. But never bind yourself again to miserable secrecy; I cannot endure it; I must have all your confidence or none."

A look of triumph sprang into her eyes, and she smiled a little.

"Jan," she said softly, using her diminutive for my name. "Jan, are you jealous?"

Her words stung me with their truth, but I resented them.

"You may call it by the name that best pleases you, Janita. It matters little, so that you heed my wishes," I replied with cold hauteur.

She made no reply, but the same quivering expression of pain crossed her face that I had seen there the night I told her her dower lay untouched in the bank.

"But, John," she ventured to say after a few moments, "you will go to this reception to-morrow. Oh! you must go——"

"I will never willingly cross his threshold again in this life," I burst forth harshly. "Let me hear no more. I am heartsick over the matter." And she shrank from me, hopelessly.

As usual Susy was the peacemaker. She came to me the following day with a note from Harold. In stately terms he begged I would not absent myself from his studio the following evening. If I would suspend my judgment he felt sure I should be happier in



every way, and do him justice in exonerating him from all save thoughtlessness.

Susy gazed at me so pleadingly as I read that I consented to go, glad at heart to feel obliged to crush the troubled thoughts of the last few days. I never wanted to doubt my brother.

To my surprise Mr. Barney called that evening while Susy was still with us. I had not asked him to call again, nor had Janita. He was very entertaining, but it impressed me that he was a little too untrammelled by formalities. His black eyes rested too boldly upon Janita's beauty and the delicate contour of Susy's face. I found myself watching him narrowly, trying to define an impression that ever eluded me.

During his visit little Jan was brought in for his good-night kiss. As I held him aloft on my shoulder, proud of his rippling sunny curls and dimpled beauty, Mr. Barney said, jestingly:

"He has a golden shower upon his head. A precious treasure, Mr. Willoughby, one all the wealth of England could not buy."

"Why of England? Add that of America, France, the Indias, the world, in fact, and you still could not measure his weight in value. Say good night, Jan, and let us gallop to bed!"

Whereat the boy shook his hand at the others, and I bore him away.

On the evening of the reception at Harold's studio I felt Janita to be in a strangely excited mood. She looked pale when she came to me as I waited for her,



She wore the black velvet, which was always my favorite gown for her. About her neck were the pearls. Her eyes shone like stars and her hands trembled as she drew on her gloves.

"Janita," I said, moved by some impulse to speak as I had longed to do, ever since my harshness the night she referred to her hapless dower. "I fear I was unkind to you Tuesday night. I was surprised into sternness. I want you to understand——"

"I do understand you," she interposed quietly, standing with humbly drooping head. She was a vision of loveliness thus, and I was moved as never before by her sweet, white face.

"I do understand you. I also realize how untrue, how dishonest I have been, how unworthy your regard as your wife and Jan's mother. I was blind, I was *mad* to permit myself to think I could ever be more than a burden to you. I cheated myself into the belief that you were using that money because I wanted to be a little content and happy, but now——"

"Are you not content or happy, my wife?"

"I am growing strong to live without either content or happiness. And perhaps to-night you may forgive me all I have done. But remember, John, it is Harold who has been my friend in helping me to accomplish this slight atonement. And what I have done for him is but a poor return, coupled with your anger toward him. Remember this to-night when you meet him, John, I ask it not for my sake, but your own."

I merely bowed assent. Her earnest words seemed



to place her far from me. In silence I wrapped her cloak about her, and then with an impulse of tenderness pressed my lips to her cheek. She scarcely seemed to notice the caress.

When we entered the ante-room of Harold's studio we were evidently very early.

"Was not the hour on the card, Janita?" I asked, not a little annoyed to be so prompt. I craved no interview with my brother.

"Yes—Harold wished us to be here at eight," she replied, and then she put her arm through mine, and I felt that she was trembling as we entered Harold's studio, brilliant with its luxurious appointments.

I was dazzled by the bright lights, even while I felt Susy, clad in silvery white, was claiming my attention, and then my brother clasped my hand heartily as he said:

"Ah! John, the time has come when two women, two wilful women, have their way. Some one else here wishes to greet you."

And surely there stood my Aunt Mildred, resplendent in satin and diamonds, and something brighter and better than diamonds shining in her eyes, as she stretched forth her hands to me.

Seven years since those dear eyes had looked into mine with love, and the sorrow of those years swept over me as I clasped her hands and bowed my face upon them.

"My aunt, you have forgiven me?" I said in a low tone.



"Yes, John. I love you still, and love means forgiveness," she said, tremblingly, and I saw that the others had withdrawn and we were alone.

"Aunt, I was, and still am, unworthy your love. I was rash, cruel, and foolish in my——"

"No, no, John, we are both Willoughbys. That is saying enough. But your wife and the little boy won me, John. Susy and Harold drew me on. They taught me to love him day by day, until I used to come here, in fear lest the mother would not bring the child for his portrait. And after that when Janita came to please Harold she brought the pretty rogue still, and he wound his arms about my neck and called me 'god-mamma' so prettily. I did not know it was your child until I loved both mother and babe. No matter where you found your wife, John, no wonder you love her. She is lovable beyond words."

This then was the plot; this what Janita thought would atone for all else. I was more overwhelmed than I had been in the days of struggling misery. I battled then for endurance, now the tide of gratitude swept over me like a storm, and I shook with tearless sobs. My aunt let my emotion have sway; then as if to restore me said in her quick, blunt way:

"But mind, John, every cent of mine goes to Harold. The boy has my love, that should satisfy you."

"It is all he will ever claim, dear aunt. May he live to appreciate all that that love means."

"Let us pray he may be guided more wisely than we have been. But here is Susy back again, and Janita



with Harold, and the other guests will soon arrive. Do you stay near me, John, for I am strange to so much genius as will be assembled here to-night. Janita, you look pale, child. Come and kiss me."

I grasped Harold's hand fervently, and we needed no words. Susy came in for a cousinly kiss, and Janita alone stood a little aloof from the group we formed. She did not heed my aunt, but as I stretched my hand to her I saw her face change. An ashen hue spread over the already pallid features, her eyes were fixed on the doorway.

I stepped toward her, quickly casting a glance toward the door, and saw, as she had seen, Mr. Wallace Barney standing in the ante-room gazing in at her. And did I fancy it? Was his finger laid in warning on his lips?

One could see the mobile mouth and white teeth now, for his black beard was shaven, and he appeared like another man. Janita caught at my arm.

"Take me home, Jan," she whispered.

"You are ill; what is it, my dear?" I said nervously.

"No—it is over now! I was faint. I thought I saw—a ghost. Keep near me, for God's sake, keep near me!"

She added this in another whisper as she rallied and tried to reply gaily to Susy's anxieties. Mr. Barney came toward us. In his wake were several other guests and the rooms were soon filling rapidly. Janita, who was always much sought after, was soon laughing and talking, but always with that furtive glance of fear



toward Barney that perplexed and annoyed me. Once I saw her go to Harold as if entreating something, but he refused her laughingly. She tried to follow him, however, to an inner room, where his recently-completed picture was to be exhibited, but on the threshold she met Mr. Barney and drew back. Twice after this I saw my wife try to speak to Harold quietly, and observed that Barney so placed himself as to baffle her purpose, and it troubled me.

About ten o'clock Harold took his place beside the door of the inner room, and, after rapping for silence, said:

"My friends, I promised to-night to give you a glimpse of the picture I have recently painted. I ask your frank criticism. You will find it within this room. I may as well add that I dedicate the work to my brother and his wife, to whom I owe the purest inspirations and some of the happiest hours of my life. Will you enter?"

They passed in, laughing comments being made upon his short speech. My aunt was on my arm, and Harold had gone at once to Janita's side. Barney, with Susy, contrived in some way to keep between my wife and me. I found myself striving to watch my wife.

Then as Harold drew the crimson curtain away from the picture I started back aghast at what was revealed, and did not even realize that Janita had glided to my side, and stood there trembling and white.

Within the frame stood Janita, or her counterpart, in the doorway of the old Axtell house, just as Harold



and I had seen her that eventful night, and as I remembered he had sketched the scene from memory. But she held no candle in her slender hand, one of which was raised to shade her eyes, while on her other arm, his golden head against her shoulder, one small hand laid on the pearls about her throat, was our little Jan, fast asleep.

"Motherhood," exclaimed a voice full of delight. "Madonna Nita."

"Beautiful! Willoughby; you have been inspired, surely."

"The jewels are rarely painted."

These comments passed by me unnoticed. Pain and pleasure were tugging at my heart. Was this, then, the Heaven-taught lesson of my temptation and fall? This picture, to live forever as an illustration, of a wretched hour of weakness.

Once more that terrible period of my life seemed to pour its flood of bitterness over me, and I shuddered. Could I ever live down such a memory? Would it not, like this picture, arise to confront me, when I seemed most at peace? No—God had been good to me. He had brought forth from the wreck of my honor this lovely woman to bless my sinful life; this sweet child about whom were twined my very heart strings. Why not humbly accept this lesson, and trust His loving kindness forevermore?

I felt Harold pass his arm affectionately about my shoulders.

"What think you of it, old fellow? Will you for-



give me my imprudent error, and believe that I had no thought in all I did which was not true to you and Susy?"

"Harold!"

It was all I could say for a few moments, as we looked into each other's eyes; then I added:

"Susy has consented to become your wife?"

"Yes, in a day or two every one will know it. But here is your wife. She thinks, dear child, that I take the cream of your opinion and rob her of compliments."

But Janita was pressing close to me her face full of terror.

"Take me home, John," she said hoarsely. "I can bear no more—I am ill, oh! take me home!"

She clung to me, her eyes full of pleading, but Mr. Barney at her side, laid a detaining hand upon her arm.

"Madam," he said in a cold, low voice, "your illness is well-timed. Before you and your husband depart I will have one question answered. Where did you obtain the jewels worn about your neck to-night, and represented so cleverly in this picture? It is a question of importance to me."



## CHAPTER X.

“There was a laughing devil in his sneer.”

—*Byron.*

As these words fell on my ear it seemed as if all in the room must have heard them. I felt the blood rush throbbing to my temples as I hastily glanced about me.

Harold had passed on to Susy, and seemed all engrossed in the picture. We stood somewhat apart from the others. I replied slowly as I drew Janita's trembling hand through my arm.

“This, sir, is hardly the time or place for such abrupt inquiries. My wife is ill. I will see you to-morrow, at any hour you name.”

“That will not serve me,” he returned in a determined tone. “To-night must confirm or dispel my suspicions. You will kindly follow me. I may detain you but a moment. It all depends upon the lady. We may make use of Mr. Willoughby's apartments.”

So saying he walked toward the door at the end of the studio, which led to Harold's private suite, and with easy familiarity he stood holding the door open for us to pass in.

“Since you have the bad taste to insist upon this interview, we must even grant it,” I said sternly, as I entered, half carrying Janita, who murmured a pro-



test. "Speak at once, and I will endeavor to satisfy your demand. You must be aware how inopportune such a request appears, especially when forced in this disagreeable manner upon the brother of your host."

For reply he softly closed the door and locked it putting the key in a conspicuous place on the mantelshelf.

The room in which we stood was Harold's bedchamber. It was elegantly furnished, the bed in its alcove of silk hangings, and every appointment bringing into evidence the owner's artistic taste. I had never been in this room of Harold's before. Now the very clock ticking monotonously on the mantel, in the brief silence that fell seemed to mock me, and I heard once more those ugly voices, long silenced by the happier tones of wife and child, "Perjured, forsworn, dishonored."

Janita sank down on a low divan, turning her face from us both. Barney broke the silence in a smooth, clear voice. His white teeth shone pleasantly. I noted, with a curious sensibility to trifles, how beautiful was his mouth, shorn of the dark beard.

"I am sorry to have so agitated Madam," he said. "My question was, as I have already stated, one of peculiar interest to me. I may as well tell you at once, I am engaged in the secret service of the government. In other words I am a detective."

"Impossible!"

The words burst from Janita's lips as she rose to her feet, and stood gazing at Barney. He bore her



scrutiny with a smile, but narrowed his eyes to a slow scorn, until she sank back to her former position, watching him, with a face full of misery and fear.

"Madam doubts the statement. I do not wonder at that. When we last met I was not following my present line of business. That is no matter. What I require of you to-night is that you tell me where you procured the pearls worn by Mrs. Willoughby."

Janita's hand sought the pearls as if she would tear them from her throat, but I took her hand in mine and replied steadily:

"These jewels my wife assures me belonged to her mother. It is all she has that belonged to her family, and she is greatly attached to them."

"Doubtless," he said with a sarcastic intonation. "Any reminder of her family must be dear to her, since she has always shown a marked attachment for them when fortune smiled. Since this is the case Madam also knows where the rest of the jewels are concealed?"

"Sir—Mr. Barney—you are my brother's guest and friend, or I should not brook such conduct. Take advantage of your present situation as you will, but address yourself to me, and not to my wife. I am ready to answer any of your demands."

"Your pardon, sir! I accede to your request at once. We will spare the lady, as far as possible. The piece of history is hardly one that will add to your happiness, yet I am forced to a plain unvarnished statement. About eight years ago, a daring robbery



was committed in Brooklyn, and among other things stolen was a box of jewels worth a small fortune. They belonged to an English family of wealth, and the jewels being peculiar in their setting, there was but a small chance of their being turned to account, without prompt detection. At this time a notorious band of thieves, with a foreigner at their head as Captain, were cleverly eluding the police. They were known to haunt the outskirts of Flatbush, but their rendezvous was never twice the same place. Immense rewards were offered for the recovery of the jewels, but the search proved fruitless. The arrest of their Captain, a surly Hollander, failed to elicit any information. He was tried and condemned to fifteen years in the Penitentiary, but refused to betray his comrades, or his knowledge of the jewels."

He paused a moment, for Janita had given voice to a low exclamation, as she bent her head upon her hands. Then he continued rapidly.

"As years passed on the event was almost forgotten by all save those on the detective force. About four years ago it was whispered among the force, that one of the confederates in the robbery had made his appearance in Brooklyn. He was watched and it was discovered that they were using the old Axtell House in Flatbush as a rendezvous. The house was tenantless and well suited to their purpose. The police were once more on the trail, but once more they were baffled. Upon searching the house, traces of the thieves' sojourn were discovered, but the jewels



were missing. It was my fortune to know at this time—" he spoke more slowly now, watching Janita with that narrowing scornful glance, "a very beautiful girl, who was some relation to one of the gang of thieves. In my profession I make curious friendships. She had a brother whom she feared, and she sought to escape his influence. She was a child in years, but she had the audacity of an adventuress reared in infamy. She led me to believe that by marrying her, I would learn the secret of the jewels. She thought me a young and foolish lover. So I was, but I was also a detective. The night before I was to procure the jewels she gave me the slip, and disappeared with the brother, and the jewels. Since then I have endeavored to find her. I have spent four years in the search, to no avail. To-night I am rewarded. I recognize in Mrs. Willoughby, the beautiful woman, the child whom I admired. The jewels and the picture all convince me—the evidence is complete. I am sorry to make this disclosure since it must grieve and shock you, but business is business. If you doubt my right to interview you thus, I present my card."

As he spoke he held toward me a card. From the moment he addressed himself to me, I felt as if a thousand demons were tearing at my heart.

Janita's crouching figure and low moan only added to the fury raging within me. This then was to be the end—this the awful curse I had incurred. And to augment the agony, I knew, no matter what she had



been; no matter how black her past, or shameless her antecedents, she was the mother of my child, my wife, and I loved her. Yes, she was dearer to me than all the world in this moment of horrible doubt. Could the memory of patient, unwearying effort, wifely devotion and unblemished conduct be wiped out in one moment, by these dastardly words, recounting a sullied past? Was there no justice to deal with what her life had been with me? Must its beauty be blotted out by what had gone before?

I stood with clenched hands and blanched face, struggling with the overwhelming force of the passionate love awakened in me, and the thought of her shame.

I uttered no word, even when she came toward me, her dark eyes burning restlessly, her face ashen white.

"John," she said, in a low intense tone, "Jan,—my husband—I swear I never loved any man save you. Can you not believe my simple word? Oh! God! have I ever deceived you, that you should doubt me now? I know you do not love me, that you never can. But I have tried to please you, and now—oh! by the love we bear the child, by your knowledge of my life with you—tell me, do you believe that man? I make no protest. Your own heart must answer the question that condemns me. If so, I will go forth alone, and you may teach my child to hate me. No—no—learn to speak of me as of the dead. Only—only—let it be—gently—Jan, and say at least she loved us—once—and always."



She raised her face to mine, the tears coursing down her cheeks, hands clasped upon her forehead.

I bent eagerly toward her, and saw doubt, misery, despair, in those beautiful eyes, but no shadow of shame or shrinking. They were the eyes I had grown to love, and I saw truth and pleading looking forth upon me. I drew her into my arms, my heart beating even in that moment, with a wild exultation.

"Before God," I cried, "you are my true wife, I believe this, and I know I love you as my life and will protect you, until death shall part us."

She gave a cry like a suddenly released spirit, and hid her face upon my breast. Then she drew back proudly.

"Thank God, I can bear all now, since you love me. Before I had no hope. Now! oh! you shall know the truth, dear heart—the truth—the truth!"

She drew away from me and faced Barney, who had taken two or three steps toward us, with a lowering brow. Janita went swiftly to the mantel and taking the key handed it to me.

"Madam, you are bold. You make me your prisoner," he said, with cold composure. "I hope you mean to do nothing rash?"

"I mean that my husband shall hear the truth, or you do not leave the house to-night. You have rested safe in my fear of you—I am protected now. You have changed your rôle, as I have mine. I know you, Frederick Orme. I knew you the moment you looked at me to-night, and I no longer fear you."



He started, his eyes widening in surprise and anger.

"Have a care," he muttered in a low tone.

"This man," continued Janita, with very much the same steady composure that had curved his lips a moment before, "this man is my brother. The confederate who escaped the punishment that overtook one of his comrades. It was he who hid the jewels and money in the haunted chamber, and would have sold me to any man, to gain his end. At first I did not recognize him, but now the beard is gone, I see and know him in his true character. He trusted my former cowardice to shield him. The days when I used to crouch beneath his oath and blow are past."

Barney never moved nor changed color as she spoke, only once the hand at his side twitched nervously. Then he said, folding his arms with easy nonchalance:

"Now I think, Jan, you have played your trump card. I admire your pluck, and am proud to be your brother. But all this does not alter my position on the police force. I also have changed my rôle, with a fortune as fickle as yours, and it behooves me to remind my sister that a man's reformation is surer and swifter of attainment, than the soiled virtue of a woman——"

He got no further for my hand was on his throat and he was whirled back against the wall furiously.

"John, for Heaven's sake, have patience—release him—anger will gain nothing," Janita cried, and it re-



called me. I released him slowly, and panted with the angry passion I dared not vent upon him then and there.

"You miserable dog! remember, it is my wife of whom you speak. Let me hear no more of insult, or the little patience I have will be exhausted."

"Thank you," he said with cool politeness, settling his cravat. "Evidently, brother-in-law, you are a man of strength; I have but little to add. Since my fair sister acknowledges the family tie, I will frankly confide in you. I confess I thought to play another game, and pose as her rejected lover. I meant to break up these affectionate family relations, as a slight revenge for the trick she played me four years ago. Now I resign revenge, and take to an honest line. I am Fred Orme, nevertheless I have been on the detective force for ten months. My scheme is to restore those long-lost jewels, and receive the reward offered. If you consent to quietly place the money and jewels in my hands, I will promise quiet and discretion as to my charming sister's being a member of the depraved family connected with the robbery, and my brother-in-law the receiver of stolen goods. For myself I am safe. An old pal of mine, bearing my name, was tried and convicted with the old man. You cannot prove I am Frederick Orme, and if you dare to *try* to do so"—he grew defiant suddenly—"by God! I will bring that proud Willoughby blood of yours to the very dust! You can hardly hesitate, if you still have the jewels, and I am sure you cannot



have sold them or I should have discovered it. If you owe your present position to the use of the money. I only ask that you restore to me the original amount. I think since you made so little ado as to selling your honor, Mr. Willoughby, I am sure, for your wife's sake, that you will consider my terms reasonably cheap for buying it again."

"No, John, no!" Janita interposed as I started to speak. "You cannot deal with such as he——"

"And you shall never address him again," I said firmly, putting her aside. I had stilled the anger, that throbbed and whirled through my blood a moment before. His reference to the Willoughby pride had been like ice to my former passion.

"I have listened patiently to you, sir, and beg a like attention. You have contrived to place me apparantly in your power, but you cannot bully me into cringing fear. Know that the jewels and money lie unmolested as on the day I found them. These pearls alone were removed from the box——"

"And she is right about them. They are hers, she can keep them," he interrupted. "I see we begin to understand each other."

"I sincerely hope we do," I continued in a hard tone, "but my wife will never wear those pearls again. Now in transferring the jewels to you, with my knowledge of all you have told me, I am conniving at further theft. Permit me to say, you have overreached yourself in your frankness, as you did but recently in calculating on the fears of Mrs. Willoughby.



It is impossible for me to comply with your request. The treasure must be restored in a straightforward and honest manner."

"As they were taken, I presume. What defense will you make for your conduct in retaining stolen property? I tell you, man, you must make your choice. Comply quietly with my request, and I remain silent respecting your desire to prop your fallen honor, and clear your wife's reputation. But dare thwart me of my purpose, and I swear I will bruit your shame abroad, will proclaim your wife's past and parentage, and so hamper every move you make in life——"

"Be silent! do not threaten me. You are not dealing now with a woman, but a man, whose very shame makes him bold to act. Cowardly and yielding I may have been in the past. But to-day my word is as good as yours."

"What you may not fear for yourself, may yet harshly recoil on others," he said, continuing his argument steadily and with cunning penetration for my vulnerable point. "You have a son, whom you love; a brother who shares with you shame, as well as affection. For the sake of them pause and consider my proposition. I am only inexorable where it is inevitable. You shall have until to-morrow evening to decide your course. We meet, I believe, at your aunt's residence in Flatbush, wherein this treasure has been concealed. Your brother's betrothal to Miss Sidney is to be announced. Let me know your decision to-morrow



night. Until then shall we consider this interview at an end? I think your wife is not well."

As he spoke, Janita clasped one hand over her eyes, and plucked at the pearl necklace at her throat.

"It chokes me, John, take it—off—unclasp it, quickly," she gasped, and as I unfastened the tiny diamond clasp she sank in my arms insensible.

In a moment Barney was the attentive friend. I could only hold Janita while he brought water, in which to bathe the white, beautiful face.

"By Jove," he murmured, as he watched me, "but she is a brave one! she has some of the old blood in her to think of defying me!"

At the sound of his voice, she opened her eyes, and descrying him moaned out:

"Oh, Fred, how could you strike me. I did not tell him—I did not——"

Then seeing my face bent over, to intercept her view of him, she burst into tears, crying:

"Oh! thank God, thank God, you are here."

"Mr. Barney," I said with studied courtesy, as I soothed her gently, "be kind enough to call my carriage, and also say to my brother that, as my wife is ill, we have returned home. We will make our exit by the inner passage and leave the other guests undisturbed. As you have named the hour and place for my decision, so be it. To-morrow night at seven o'clock at my aunt's house in Flatbush."

He simply bowed, and left the room, after requesting, with a smile, the key of the door. His manner was



without reproach. He returned shortly, accompanied by Harold. Harold was much moved by Janita's pale face, and conducted her himself to the carriage. I was detained a few moments by Barney, who stooped and picking up something from the carpet handed it to me. It was Janita's pearls.

I took them from him, and deliberately placed them on the floor, and ground them under my heel, my teeth set in sudden rage and disgust. He smiled a little, and as I passed out I involuntarily glanced back. He had once more recovered the necklace, and as I looked he severed the diamond clasp from the crushed pearls, and looking up met my glance, and smiled.

\* \* \* \* \*

Janita was in a raging fever, and I carried her from the carriage muttering incoherent sentences in which she alternately pled for mercy from her brother, or exclaimed joyfully that I was near and loved her. Nor could I leave her a moment for two or three hours. She had been ill in this way once before, when excitement had overwhelmed her nerves, and a night's rest and soothing draughts had restored her in a few hours. I was not wrong in judging this to be a similar attack. After a time she lay quietly in my arms, opening her eyes occasionally to see that I remained with her, or to caress my hand, against which she rested her cheek.

Finally in her old tone, but very languidly, she said:

"Jan, dearest, I am so selfish. You are tired out, and I keep you up. Lay me down and kiss me, and I



will try and sleep. I must be strong to help you to-morrow."

"That is my own brave girl. Do not try to think, but sleep, dear child, and remember my love for you. Love that has been in my aching, cowardly heart for years. Rest quietly, and do not dread to-morrow, for I will meet all that alone."

"No, no, never alone again while I live. *Together*, John, unto the end."

"Yes, dearest, all that you can give of aid I know I shall have. But tell me, I was too disturbed to comprehend all Harold said as he put you in the carriage. He spoke of Susy's Hallowe'en frolic?"

"Oh," she said, smiling a little at this one cheerful reminder of the completion of her secret. To-morrow night is Hallowe'en and we are to spend it at Aunt Mildred's. Harold's betrothal will be announced, and a small dinner will be given to a few of his friends, and a dance will follow. Oh! Jan, how can we go——"

"You need not endure this further trial of courage and strength but I must go, since I meet this man there. Now lie quietly, dear one, for I must leave you."

"Not for long, Jan, and if you go, I will go also. I will be strong for this, never fear."

Alone in my study, I confronted the situation and endeavored to see my way out of the labyrinth of shame and sorrow, into which the downward step of my youth had plunged me. Painfully I once more dragged to light those scenes of my life, and reviewed them by



a clearer light than hitherto. I began to see how Janita, young, and shrinking from daily cruelty and coarseness, had used her woman's ingenuity to escape the horror of the life she led with her brother. I saw how he was trying to use her now, to serve the purpose of drawing me into theft a second time. It lay with me now, to connive with him, and give him the power to place me below his level; or to defy all his threats and deliver the gold and jewels to the city authorities to be dealt with as they thought best.

Thank God! there was no hesitation in my own mind regarding what it was right to do at this time. I was confused by no doubts. But I found myself murmuring that I had truly tried to expiate the past. Janita's happiness, and my great love for her, atoned for the blackness of my heart when I married her. I paused, and with white trembling lips, appealed to God, to bear me witness of the sincerity of my repentance. A voice within answered that appeal proclaiming how fruitless was any human expiation as a means of averting the consequences of wrong-doing. God does forgive us, as heartily as we repent, and puts in our way the means to the end of repentance, but the inevitable result of the act recoils upon us, and we must bear its burden. Alas! if we only had to endure the agony—but the curse of our wrongs is laid upon those we love, whose lives are indissolubly linked with ours. The old scar wakes and throbs, and we are fortunate if the wound break not forth afresh and call for endurance as well as patience. No rebellion against the in-



evitable revenge of outraged physical laws, can be more absurd than our revolt against the torture we furnish for our souls by transgressing spiritual laws.

It is the Nemesis of the Greeks ; the Furies that drove Orestes mad, and involved the Laocoon in the meshes of the serpent. Every religion and philosophy has personified, at some time, this formidable establishment of consequences.

I bowed my head before the flood of reason overwhelming the foolish irreverent words upon my lips, and throwing myself upon my knees, cried aloud to Him for help in this sorest hour of need.

When I arose the light of day was streaming through the closed shutters. One of the servants was at the door. He brought word that Mr. Harold Willoughby had called at midnight, but finding the study door locked, and receiving no reply Mary had discreetly judged I must not be disturbed. Harold had left a hurried note for me.

“ JOHN :

“ I am anxious about Nita, and stop on my way from taking Susy home. I fear something disagreeable happened at the studio. May I call early and hope to find you?

“ HAROLD.”

I did not wish to see my brother. I wanted to remain strong in my resolution of the night vigil. I knew no sight would shake me like that of seeing him, or my son. Moreover, I could not cloud his happy day with



this trouble. He should remain in ignorance for awhile yet. So I wrote a hasty reply, forbidding him to come to the house that day; assuring him of Janita's recovery, and pleading duties that would give me no leisure until I met him at my aunt's house at dinner.

I then crept softly to Janita, whom I found sleeping quietly, and only venturing a light kiss on her slender hand, I left the house.

I went directly to the office of a man whom I had known for years as one of Brooklyn's most upright lawyers. He had been a friend of my father's, but since his death I had never seen Mr. Ralston save on the street. A dignified rather austere man, I had always stood in awe of him. Now I felt I could rely on his clear stern judgment of my past. I wanted no lawyer who would find for me a quibble in the law to exonerate my conduct. This would be to turn again into that labyrinth of deceit and shame from which I wished to escape, even should it bring me to public dishonor.

Mr. Ralston met me with formal courtesy. I thought he did not recognize me. He looked surprised at my request for a private interview, but led the way to an inner office.

Here I told him the history of my temptation, omitting no humiliating detail, and wound up by a plea for his advice, and honest judgment, no matter how harsh the latter might prove.

When I had finished he remained silent for some time, with folded arms and compressed lips. He had



hardly looked at me during my trying recital, yet I knew he had heard and weighed every word. He finally spoke:

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-eight this month."

"I trust there are no children by this marriage?"

"I have a son, sir."

"Ah!" he looked at me sharply, and something in the glance made me feel more sure of his kindly nature. "It is a bad business, young man, from the very beginning; a darker story of rash transgression has seldom reached my ears. What you desire is my advice. That I judge is your motive in coming here. I knew your father. I know your brother and your aunt. I have watched your career. I felt you had not trodden in the usual paths of the Willoughbys, but I little anticipated the revelations you have just made. The way, however, may be clearer before you than you think. It is the crying social evil of the world to-day that it treats lightly that which does not seriously affect a man's financial standing, no matter how closely it may involve his honor."

I bowed my head in silence.

"You blush at that and I am glad to see you color. If I am not mistaken, however, you want the unvarnished truth from me?"

"I do indeed, sir," I replied.

"You have not used this money, it lies in the bank still. Your name in politics and business circles, and as a member of the press is without reproach. All



this speaks in your favor. If in your own soul you know you have sinned against God's holy laws, that is between you and your God. Lawyers, or the state and city authorities, have nought to do with that. To-morrow morning go with me to the City Hall, and deliver up the treasure with an account of how it was found in the house owned by your aunt. You have influence with the press, keep it out of the newspapers if you can—if not, have it clearly and honestly detailed, omitting as a matter of course, the part involving your wife, and your conscience, and the exact date of the discovery. Few will question its being a recent discovery, since Mrs. Willoughby bought the house a year ago and has made frequent alterations. As for this undesirable brother-in-law, give him to understand at once that his game is up. I can only see that he lays the way to future annoyance, if you weakly yield to any demand. He is really powerless to injure you. If he is as he says, a member of the detective corps, he has placed in your hands the weapon of his defeat. A call at headquarters, with a report of the use he tried to make of knowledge gained, would settle his account at once. Such an act made public would ruin him professionally. I am under the impression that this man is relying greatly upon your family pride, your horror of scandal, and perhaps your youth."

I murmured something about going abroad, with my wife and child. He interrupted me with a frown.

"I never knew a Willoughby to be a coward. Stay where you are and face the battle. The conditions,



I admit, are hard. A father-in-law in the penitentiary, and a brother-in-law headed that way. But you helped yourself to these contingencies, now abide by them. To go away would be to confirm the dastardly lies he may circulate, for look you—we are not seeking to overreach this damned scoundrel, but with the truth to circumvent him. Do not let me hear of your giving him one dollar as hush money. When you do that, young man, I am done with you.”

I hastened to assure him that my sole anxiety was to do what was right, even should I suffer in so doing. That it seemed impossible that I should feel keener suffering than I had already undergone as I was only eager now, to spare my family, and to separate my wife from scenes that served to cruelly remind her of the past.

Something in my face and impassioned emphasis seemed to touch him. He took a turn or two up and down the room. Then said:

“Come to me to-morrow at nine o’clock. I would go with you at once but I must be in the court room at ten. Together we will see this thing out. I like you—I believe your repentance is hearty. Keep a brave front, and hope for the best, for the sake of your wife—and son.”

He clasped my hand warmly a moment then quickly assuming his austere formality, bowed me from the room.



## CHAPTER XI.

“ Faith alone can interpret life,  
And the heart that aches and bleeds with the stigma,  
Of pain, alone bears the likeness of Christ,  
And can comprehend its dark enigma.”

—*Golden Legend.*

WITH this cold comfort at my heart, I was forced to go to my daily routine of duties. But withal a strange peace seemed to pervade me. I no longer felt the dull weight of anxiety. Mr. Ralston's words had awakened once more all my former faith in a Higher Power, and I felt that the Father had seen my deep penitence, and had sent a messenger of peace to still the restless pulse of pain. I remembered that the word messenger meant angel, and felt this calm could only come through His will, to cheer me on my hard way, and little as I felt I deserved help, in just so much were my humble thanks sincere and earnest.

I did not think of the impending interview with Barney. I let my thoughts continually dwell lovingly upon the wife awaiting me; on the son I must strive to place beyond the temptations I had suffered. Ah! how little do we realize that our deepest love is insufficient to shield our dear ones from temptation. How every soul must reach to Him of itself, and work out



redemption. And how slow we are to learn that the only way is to go to Him, even if we stumble occasionally and fall.

As I turned homeward, however, thoughts of the evening would force themselves upon me. I wondered if my aunt would throw open that large ball-room for the dancing, and I shuddered as I remembered having followed Janita up the narrow stairway to the haunted chamber. As yet I knew Susy had not discovered any portion of this secret passage.

The autumn had been a very early one, and on this last day of October, a light fall of snow sent feathery flakes over me as I walked along and reminded me of another walk I had taken years ago, when I plodded along in bitterness of spirit and the cloud upon the horizon of my youth was a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, yet I had permitted it to cast its shadow on my heart. Alas! how every step of my downward course had been through self; through commiseration, justification of self, and selfish desires.

I found my aunt's carriage at my door, and Janita awaiting me in some anxiety. The carriage had arrived, the coachman bearing a note from my aunt. It was full of affectionate solicitude. She wished us to bring Harold and return to spend the night at the Hall.

"I know you were ill last night, and Harold thinks the long drive would be an obstacle to your being present this evening. Our lovers would be very much disappointed should you not come. So would I. I



want my little boy here. So bring little Jan, and big Jan and come."

"Janita, my dear, I cannot let you accompany me," I said, pressing her white face against my breast, "it is too hard a task to permit you to endure another hour of that man's presence."

"No, John, I must be with you," she replied, "my place is at your side, no matter what may happen. And Jan, I am brave now to meet my trouble, I am almost—happy," she added in a whisper, tears dimming her eyes, "if I only had not brought this cloud upon you."

"That must not fret you, dearest," I replied, and told her the result of my interview with Mr. Ralston. She listened earnestly.

"I cannot feel entirely safe while he is near," she said as I concluded. "I always feared him. He is so cruel. He delights in hurting one. He loves to revenge the slightest wrong. He thinks I have wronged him. Oh, John, how can you forgive me for all I have brought upon you——"

"Janita! do you wish to reproach me, and make my burden heavier. Only my present love for you could lift the stain of unholiness in our hasty marriage. Your sweet purity; your lovely wifeliness, has washed away the taint of my sin. You have redeemed me, Janita. Your love, and Susy's forgiveness, have made me a better man despite the foul fiend within me. To you I owe the present and the future."

She was silent a moment, leaning against me, with



a sad little smile quivering over the lips that met mine. Then she said:

"But there is one thing I think of continually, Jan. Our boy, our son, he has this same blood in his veins. That man is his—uncle. And oh! the misery, the shame, that may be his with this knowledge as his heritage. He may learn to hate his mother."

"My darling!"

"Or worse, dear," she continued rapidly, "we may live to see that cursed passion leaping into his eyes and feel the horror of all I have given him of sin and suffering, overwhelming him. Oh! John, I cannot bear it, I cannot bear to think of it!"

I held her close, until her passion of weeping was spent. Then I tried to comfort her, feeling how feeble was the effort, for she was only going over the ground of my suffering the night before, when I knelt before my Maker in humbleness and prayer, until the dawn found me worn and spent, but at peace.

She raised her head finally, and laid her soft cheek against mine.

"I am so selfish, John, to trouble you now. You look so tired. I must tell you something strange and sweet that chanced to-day. No doubt you will say it is one of my fancies, but indeed I really saw it. I was thinking these sad thoughts that have been slowly gathering here," she paused pressing her hand to her head, "ever since Jan was born."

"Is this what has changed you so, my little child-wife?"



"Am I changed? I do not know, only I could not bear to show my love for you, when I felt the weight of woe it brought you. As my love grew deeper, I felt how little you returned it. I saw other married people, and—I knew. To-day I sat by Jan as he slept and I soon fell to weeping. I saw his life clouded by this shame; I fancied the dark blood coloring his dear face with ugly rage, and I knelt and prayed, John, to your good God, and the dear mother of Jesus to defend our babe. And when I rose I saw, to my surprise, a butterfly hovering over dear baby's head. You know how cold it has been, and how the snow has fallen to-day. I thought I must be dreaming, but it hovered over the crib until I recovered from my surprise and examined it closely. White and delicate it lingered until I grew accustomed to seeing it, and chancing to glance away, in a moment it was gone.\*

I smiled incredulously upon her up-turned face.

"My Nita is fancying a miracle of God's love for her darling," I said.

"No, no, I saw it, John. But it did seem a promise from Heaven, for do you remember telling me that the butterfly is the symbol of immortality? My babe shall have life immortal in answer to my prayer. Oh! yes, I believe this, John, and I wept once more for very joy."

I could only kiss the quivering lips and let her faith in this sign sink into my own soul.

There was nought to do but comply with my aunt's

\* Fact.



request, and we were soon on our way to Axtell Hall, Jan in great glee at the unusual treat of a drive so late in the evening. Janita said little on our way hither. Only once she bent toward me while the nurse was engaged with Jan, and said:

"John, dear, if anything should occur to-night to either of us—if one of us should die suddenly—I want——"

"Janita," I interposed aghast, "of what are you thinking? I shall be sorry that I consented to your coming, if you are going to indulge in such foolish fancies."

"No, I am well. Feel my hand how cool and firm it is. I will not speak of this again, John, but let me finish. If anything should happen to me—you will always remember how I loved you, always, and will love you still—even in my grave. I think you would some day feel me come in spirit, and wind my arms around your neck, and *make* you feel my presence."

"Dear wife, if you really love me, say no more. It pains me indescribably to have you dwell upon such thoughts."

"I will not do so again, John. Only I have been haunted by such strange thoughts. I've seen my own face white and dead, and heard you calling me in vain. There! do not look so distressed. I am relieved that I have told you and will think of it no more."

As we came in sight of Axtell Hall in the early twilight, it presented a very different aspect from my



recollection of its gloomy portals. The early snow cast a white light over the landscape; the cheery light streaming from every window, and the evident signs of life and hospitality radiating from every angle, banished the ghostlike atmosphere that had long haunted its deserted towers.

As we paused before the door, I saw Janita's eyes involuntarily seek the window of the haunted chamber. She shivered and I drew her close to me.

"Courage, dear love," I whispered, "only one more ordeal, and you shall never see him more. Keep a brave heart."

She gave me a fond, grateful look, and stepped firmly from the carriage, and responded with blithe courage to Harold's glad greeting. He was at the door in one of his merriest moods, looking so young and handsome, that when I saw Wallace Barney behind him, I felt as if confronted by an old legend, where the grinning devil tempts youth and ignorance.

Susy was there, smiling and happy, and my aunt caught little Jan to her heart, and looking at me over his shining head said:

"John, he is so like you. All Willoughby, is he not?"

Surely our welcome was a warm one, had not that one figure darkened the doorway. Had I not known of Harold's intimacy with Barney I should have been surprised to find him there as early as ourselves, for the dinner hour was set at eight.



Susy proclaimed at once that until that time she intended to monopolize Janita.

"I have oceans to tell her," she said, with a merry glance at Harold, "and there is Mr. Barney and John for you to entertain, until the dinner hour."

"Take Janita to her bedroom, Susy," said my aunt, and added, "I have given you a room in such close proximity to the haunted chamber, as they foolishly term it, that Susy thinks you will be nervous."

"Oh, no," said Janita, stooping to adjust Jan's frock. I saw she was very white. She tried to rally quickly as Harold said:

"For your comfort, Nita, I will give testimony I have slept in the same room very often, and only the substantial spirit of a mosquito disturbed me."

"Janita is not afraid of ghosts," laughed Susy, "but they may be tempted to walk to-night, for do you realize it is Hallowe'en?"

"Oh, come Susy!" I exclaimed, vexed at the folly and fearing its effect on Janita's nerves. "What has turned you into a little ghost hunter?"

"Mr. Barney, perhaps. Oh, he knows such blood-curdling tales. And to-night he is to tell us the legend of the haunted chamber. He has read up on the history of the house, and just at the witching hour of midnight he is going to try and shake our skeptical hearts. Aren't you, Mr. Barney?"

"You?" said Janita, addressing Wallace with a scorn that spoke volumes. He bowed with a look of vexation.



"Yes, Mrs. Willoughby, I found the story in an old legend of Flatbush, besides many other interesting facts connected with the house."

"Ah?" just a little indifferent exclamation, and then she met Barney's glance with a steady defiant challenge, and I knew Janita's courage was steeled for the ordeal. She went away presently with Susy, and my aunt bore Jan to her room, and we three men were left to our own devices for the hour preceding the arrival of the other guests.

Barney was not long in making his opportunity. After a little desultory talk, he said, laying an affectionate hand on Harold's arm:

"Willoughby, would you mind leaving your brother and me alone for a short time. I have discovered something that will prove invaluable to him, as a member of the press, but I cannot transmit it to any ears save his, at present."

"In other words, I am *de trop*," said Harold, smiling. "I will withdraw at once. But I can only promise you three-quarters of an hour of quiet conference. Remember gentlemen—this day is mine."

We both smiled at his evident complacency, and he left the room laughing at his own conceit.

Barney carefully closed the door on his retreating form and came and stood against the mantel-shelf. I was sitting, and I gazed into the fire steadily, leaning my forehead upon my hand.

"Well!" he said at last, in anticipation of my taking the initiative.



"Is it well, with you, Mr. Barney?" I asked looking up quietly.

"That depends upon your decision, although it must go well with me in either case. We must doubtless make the most of our time. Our dear brother is tyrannical to-day. What decision have you reached? Favorable, I hope."

"Quite favorable," I replied, as quietly as before.

"Ah! then you consent to my using the money and jewels as I wish. You show more hard sense than I credited you with, and——"

"Stop, not so fast," I interposed, "you jump to hasty conclusions, Mr. Barney. It all depends on what I consider a favorable decision. No doubt we differ widely in this matter. To-morrow, at nine o'clock, the money I found in this house, together with the jewel casket, will be in the hands of the city authorities to do with as they think best. If this is playing into your hands, I am sorry to say I misunderstood your desire last night."

He turned livid, and took a quick step toward me.

"Have you betrayed me?" he cried, revealing all his own fears by the exclamation.

"Mr. Barney," I said, rising, "I betray neither friend nor foe. If you have woven the snare in which your feet are entangled, believe me, you must reproach some one else. I am blameless in the matter."

"Do you mean to tell me that you have put it out of your power to comply with my demand? Do you



dare defy me, when I have that woman's past at my tongue's end, as a weapon——”

“Stop—if you love your life, no mention of my wife's name, or I will throttle you,” I cried, shaking with rage and the effort I made to control myself. “This is my brother's house and you are still his guest, dastardly hound that you are, to crawl into an honest man's favor. Take my plain answer to your vile threats. I do defy you. Do your worst, the recoil will still be on your own head. I give you warning. Were you thrice her brother, I would not hesitate to demand the justice, that has already placed your father under ward and key.”

“May I ask an explanation, Mr. Willoughby,” he spoke slowly and deliberately, and in a guarded manner, “of your sudden change of purpose? Is not this rash folly on your part unworthy such a shrewd business man. You send your wife's brother to the penitentiary, and place a foolish confidence in your own power to——”

“Pardon me, Mr. Barney, I do not intend sending you to the penitentiary faster than your own deeds are carrying you thither,” I replied, recovering my calmness with an effort, “but I mean to convince you that no act of yours has power to influence my conduct one way or the other. My decision is made. You may slander my wife, but I beg to assure you that I shall treat with silent contempt any endeavor of this mode of blackmail.”

His rage was hard to quell, yet after two or three



quick strides up and down the room, he came toward me, with his face smoothed to a suave expression.

"Do you know I think I still have it in my power to make you yield to my desires?" He spoke smilingly.

"I can credit you with great resources, Mr. Barney, but hardly such as you suggest."

"You have besides the wife you treasure so fondly, a son," he continued slowly. "He is only a babe now, yet you treasure him as the apple of your eye. I warn you, Mr. Willoughby, that as you refuse me to-day, the time will come when you will rue your decision. I shall never rest until I have retaliated and caused you to suffer sorrow for thus frustrating my plans. Once more consider. It is in your power still to give me the money to-morrow morning. Will you do so or not?"

"I will not give you the money or the jewels."

"You stubbornly persist in this decision? I have no faith in such strong protests. I believe that before midnight you will repent this obstinacy, and yield. If you have cause to change your mind, believe me, I am willing to grant you that womanly prerogative."

He cast a strange glance of triumph upon me, that puzzled me. I was silent, knowing that he understood how every word regarding my son cut me to the heart. His insinuations of the curse his presence might prove to my future were now his keenest weapons.

"This interview is now at an end, Mr Barney," I



said finally, with cold courtesy. "Shall we join the ladies?"

"By all means," he responded, "only take this unction to your soul. I will be avenged. You have betrayed my trust, and confided in other strength than your own. You have stooped for aid which I would scorn. There is an old adage that there is 'Honor among thieves.' It must needs be, since there is so little among gentlemen."

Before I could reply to the taunt, my little boy came running into the room. He came to kiss me good-night, his nurse was close behind him.

I snatched up the laughing child and gave him the toss in the air he loved, and kissing him put him in the nurse's arms. But he stretched his dimpled hand to Barney, with a desire to bid him good-night also. He frowned and scolded in his baby fashion, until the nurse said:

"Master Jan wants to bid the other gentleman good-night. His mama said he must be polite to every one."

Barney hesitated, then held out his arms for the child, and Jan sprang to them. It was done so quickly I had no opportunity to interfere. Barney held him quietly, and looked over his golden head at me significantly.

"You persist in your resolution? Not even this golden head will buy you the peace of dealing fairly with me?"

"Unhand the child," I said hoarsely, snatching Jan



from his arms, "not even the threat of eternal damnation would lead me to brook another word with you. Out of my sight, or I may be tempted to forget all bonds of hospitality."

Jan bursting into tears, and the nurse's frightened face, recalled me. I bent over the child striving to soothe him, and when I looked up again Barney had left the room.



## CHAPTER XII.

"Let not women's weapons, water drops,  
Stain my man's cheeks."

—*Shakespeare.*

WHEN I had sent the boy happy to bed, and calmed myself somewhat, I joined the others in the drawing-room where the guests were fast arriving. I made my way to Janita's side, and was pleased to see a tinge of color in her face. She wore white, for the first time since our marriage, and had never looked more beautiful. Harold came to me just before dinner.

"I have asked Barney to hand Janita in to dinner. I——"

"For Heaven's sake, no!" I said, laying a quick hand on his arm. He frowned.

"John, if you do not like my friend, at least remember you are *both* my guests."

"I do, dear boy, and that alone has withheld me from kicking him from the door-step. I cannot explain now, but, Harold, you are deceived in him. Do not let the scoundrel come near my wife."

"I beg your pardon, John, but I cannot help smiling, yet your new character of a jealous husband becomes you. Barney can take aunt in to dinner and you look after Susy. I'll take care of Janita."



"I am sorry to have annoyed you, Harold."

"Never mind!" he rejoined, but I saw he was vexed.

The dinner hours passed pleasantly. Harold was always a charming host, and my aunt was very happy in having around her once more the faces of those she loved.

Mr. Barney won glowing honors, by his wit and easy conversation. I found myself involuntarily admiring the versatility of this man. Knowing him to be a dishonorable villain, it would have been amusing under other circumstances to watch him playing the gentleman so cleverly. Susy, who had overcome her distrust of him, in her innocent adaptability was his unconscious aide-de-camp.

During the dinner hour Susy told me the dancing would not be in the large ballroom.

"It would have been a jolly place to dance though," said the youth on Susy's left. "I went through the house once years ago to find ghosts, and that ballroom has a prime floor for dancing."

"It is so large it gives me the shivers," returned Susy. "We are going to dance in the hall, and try some Hallowe'en charms. And then as midnight approaches Mr. Barney is going to make our hair rise on end, while he tells us the legend of the haunted chamber."

"Susy, I've a mind to quarrel with you," I said testily. "Do not let us raise any old ghosts to-night."



"Pshaw! John, I believe you are nervous," she laughed.

"I am more. I am serious, when I ask you not to request Mr. Barney——"

"Miss Sidney, do not let our sedate and prosaic friend next you argue you out of the ghost story." It was Barney who spoke across the table. I leaned back in my chair quietly and said:

"I knew the length of Mr. Barney's ears before, but I had yet to test their keenness."

He smiled good-humoredly.

"Fox and donkey?" he asked lightly. "Perhaps. But Miss Sidney must not be bullied in a reasonable desire to hear what may become family history."

Susy looked puzzled, and I did not deign to reply, but I knew after that, that no word passed between Susy and me that he did not hear.

To me the evening dragged slowly. The scene in the old hall was a very pretty one, and pleased Harold's artistic soul. The wood fire blazed in the wide chimney, and the wax candles sent a soft light over the bright fabrics of the ladies' gowns, making gay contrast with the somber wood of the old hall. Harold had secured a harper, and from his position at the end of the hall, he sent forth tinkling notes of melodious dance music, fitting sound amid the old walls. Every incident of that night is traced on my memory in letters of fire. The thrill of exhilaration in the motion of the guests as their feet kept time to the throbbing music; my aunt looking so content in her stiff bro-



caded gown and many jewels; Susy leaning on Harold's arm, her lovely face aglow with happiness, and Harold's look of pride as they passed me.

For myself I seemed to be watching a strange drama, developing under my fixed gaze. I was no longer John Willoughby, but some one else, yet I saw my own part in the scene distinctly. I laughed, jested, almost as gaily as my brother, and more than once I caught Barney's black eyes fixed on me in what I felt to be admiration for my courage in the face of his last threat. Ah! could I have read the blackness of his heart.

My wife passed me on the arm of a very youthful admirer, and she gave me a glance, which I met with a reassuring smile, and begged her to dance with me. We had never danced together before. The waltz was something quite new to society, but my wife had learned this accomplishment from Harold, and now we essayed to dance it together.

To the slow measure, we glided on as in a dream, and I whispered something in the small ear turned a little away, something that called a glad blush to her cheek. As we paused, I missed Barney from the room. A sense of uneasiness crept over me. Janita said:

"I am going to see if baby is sleeping quietly. I told Kate she might join the other servants in the lower hall after he had fallen asleep."

"Do you think he should be left alone in a strange house?" I asked.

"Oh! no harm can come of it, he is so well, and he



never rouses. But I should like to see him a moment."

"I will come with you."

Together we slipped away and found the boy sleeping sweetly, his golden curls brushing the pillow, the dark brow and long lashes that created his surprising beauty, the soft fair skin flushed with healthy slumber, and the dewy lips parted emitting the gentle breath. He was like a beautiful flower, and we stood gazing for some time at his baby charms. Then Janita busied herself with one or two light touches that mothers alone can give without awakening a child, and together we returned down the long hall.

Once I fancied I heard a step in the room adjoining ours, as we left the room, and we paused to listen. I did not hear it again, but said:

"Janita, does that man remain here all night?"

"No, Susy says not. I asked her. Harold must not remain in ignorance, even should he be forever estranged from me." Her voice shook a little. She loved my brother very dearly.

"No fear of that," I replied, but not without my own misgivings.

Barney was still absent on my return to the hall, and a thought suddenly took possession of me, that filled me with consternation. If he should arrest me for having stolen the jewels and money? He could make a clear case. Had I been foolish to defy him before yielding the treasure? But in a short time I saw him once more among the dancers.

As the hands of the clock pointed to half past eleven



Susy, with a merry gesture, called a halt in the dance.

"Now, Mr. Barney," she cried, "we want to hear this blood-curdling tale."

"Oh, how can Susy be so foolish," I murmured.

"Do you know the legend, John?" asked Janita, who was near me.

"Well enough to know old tales are the worst ghosts to raise from out of dusty graves," I replied.

A group had already formed about the fire, and we were called upon to join it, Barney placing himself just opposite me, as I stood at a corner of the mantelshelf. Janita was just back of me in the shadow, while my aunt was on my right. Harold stood at the back of Susy's chair, and as a silence fell upon us, his eyes sought mine smilingly.

"Miss Sidney has asked me to tell you the story of Axtell Hall, which I have found to be a most thrilling and romantic tale. After having complied with Miss Sidney's request, I will ask your credence for a still stranger tale relating to this house, which may prove more interesting as having occurred in your own century."

This then was his revenge. He was going to try and expose me in my aunt's house, hoping I would still make a sign, and revoke my decision. I felt Janita lay her hand warningly upon mine. I was tingling with anger, but I struggled for composure, and made no demonstration.

Briefly he sketched the story of the old Colonel Axtell's infamous band of Nassau Blues. How they



plundered the country at the time of the Revolutionary War, rendering themselves obnoxious by their British sympathies. He touched delicately on the Colonel's illicit love for the sister of his wife. How his love was returned, and how he secreted the younger sister in the tower now known as the haunted chamber. Only one attendant knew of her refuge, and the Colonel's secret passion. This attendant, Hannah by name, watched over and cared for Elinore, his beloved mistress. A secret stairway reached to this chamber, known only to the Colonel and Hannah. Otherwise the chamber must be reached by a ladder outside. Once upon returning from a long journey Colonel Axtell found the Hall in a turmoil, owing to his wife having planned a large ball in honor of his return. To his dismay he missed the faithful Hannah from among the servants, and learned she had been dead six weeks. An awful fear overcame him, but he could not betray his anxiety. The hour of the ball was at hand. The egress to the haunted chamber lay through the ballroom. But lo, when the music was at its height, while gay dancers floated hither and thither, at the stroke of midnight a lurid blue light filled the ballroom. The music died away in a long wailing discord, and a faint pitiful moan pervaded the dim room, as the door of the secret stairway slid back, and a ghastly presence floated in and straight up to Colonel Axtell. He fell where he stood, and never roused again, and the moaning presence swept from the room, and none who had heard that sound ever laughed



again. The following day the beautiful Elinore's body was discovered in the tower, where she had died of starvation. She was buried by Colonel Axtell, whose wife bereft of reason, died a short time afterward.

A shudder of mingled terror and enjoyment thrilled the young people who hung upon Barney's words, as he recounted the legend, but my aunt said hastily as he concluded:

"This is entirely too uncanny. Harold, let us have our Hallowe'en charms. No more ghosts, Mr. Barney, I beg of you."

"But he promised——"

"Oh, just one more!"

"It is just the season to be thrilled with horror."

The exclamations quite overwhelmed my aunt.

"I promise you no ghost in my second story, Mrs. Willoughby," said Barney. "It is full of reality in a stern sense, but with plenty of romance."

"Romance! oh, we must have it," cried Susy. Harold gave me a lazy smile.

"Why, yes, there is John who wields a ready pen, he may gather material for a sketch, who knows."

"Mine is a story of to-day," said Barney, in his softly modulated voice holding the attention at once. "My hero is a man of social standing and determined character. I do not mind telling you at once I am a detective employed by the government and am now on the city police force."

Harold started, the color rising to his forehead as he looked at me.



“What I tell you to-night is a true story. True, without time to cloud the marvelous statement. Nearly five years ago this house, being empty, became the rendezvous for burglars. Three bold men harbored here after a bank robbery. With them was a young and beautiful girl, convent reared, she was brought to share the life of vagabondage they led. The money stolen was hidden in this house, and to further preclude its disturbance, it was secreted in the haunted chamber. To this house came a youth of Brooklyn, and enamoured of the girl, led by her to the treasure, he seized it, and marrying the girl, thought never to be discovered.”

Harold, very white, had risen to his feet, fixing his burning eyes on Barney, while Susy shrank back in terror. The other faces depicted a perplexed interest in the story. I alone stood dumb and motionless. I could not move or speak. I watched with a strange dull fascination for his next words.

“All this came to my knowledge through my profession. I see the youth waxing prosperous on stolen wealth, holding his proud head high after his sneaking theft, and I abide my time to deliver him to justice, or if I fail in that, to disgrace and shame. One hour, one little day, and I will accomplish this. Already one dearer treasure than gold lies in my keeping, his and his wife's good name. Ay! and even a greater than that. Mr. John Willoughby, you seem interested in my story, perhaps you have some knowledge of the man?”



"Hold, Barney," Harold's voice, sharp and clear, startled the group of surprised listeners. "You have gone too far. This is no time nor place for tales of detective work. I forbid you to utter another word!"

His smothered rage, ill-concealed, spoke volumes. My aunt started, and I saw Susy shrink back, and it flashed upon me like the sharp cut of a dagger, that they might think that my brother was the culprit. Barney's insinuating tones had kindled vague suspicions in the breasts of those present. I was seized with a nameless fury to vindicate him, to permit no shadow to rest upon him. To the name of coward should I add hypocrite? I only waited to hear Barney reply in smooth tones:

"Mr. Harold Willoughby finds the tale dull because he has become already familiar with these facts. There is one way to check me, and but one——"

"There *is* one way," I cried, and leaping upon him, I threw him to the floor, and stood over him, looking down into the glittering eyes, forgetful of wife, blind to all save the love I bore my kindred. "There *is* a way. Tell the whole clear truth, if it shriek my shame to Heaven. *I* am that man he denounces! *I* am *he*, who puts all, all aside——"

"For God's sake, John!"

"John, this is madness!"

"My son, my own dear boy——"

I hear their exclamations. I know for the first moment that my wife is not near me. I am alone to cry aloud my disgrace, while Barney cowers, and the



eyes of the startled friends seem to scan my heart. I shake off Harold's hand, and lifting my arms, and as if taking an oath, say slowly:

"Before Almighty God, I swear I am he whom this man pictures. Ready to bear the burden of my unpardonable sin, but unable longer to be a hypocritical coward in your sight. He thought to gain another end, low-born dog, that he is, he lies there, to tempt me no longer——"

At this moment breaking in upon me came a sound that I hear to-day at times, and shall hear at intervals all my life, until eternity has dulled mine ears to earthly sounds. A long low scream of agony ending in a moan. It was echoed by every feminine voice in the room—the house seemed flooded with it, but to me every moan was from Janita.

I sprang toward the stairway, I only half heard Barney's exclamation:

"Damn the woman! she has tried to get the child."

I knew Harold was at my side when we reached the landing up-stairs. Together we reached the bedroom door. The room was empty; then a woman's voice called wildly.

"The ballroom, the ballroom!" I cried, and dashed Harold aside.

The door was ajar to this room, and I flung it back, casting a gleam of light across the wide polished floor, and there in the shadowy uncertain light, at the foot of the secret stairway, lay my wife and child.

They brought candles presently, and looked at us



as I crouched beside her and touched the white face of the boy, scarcely knowing what I did. I do not think they spoke at all save in whispers. I cannot remember. How still she lay, and not a quiver in the babe upon her breast. Suddenly I cried out hoarsely—Why did they not bring water to revive them? How dull they were! See, Janita stirred and moaned. I felt Harold kneel beside me hastily and lift the child from her. Janita opened her eyes, and I raised her a little in my arms. She cried out as in great agony, then with desperate strength reached toward Harold as he held the child.

“Give him to me!” she cried, her lips drawn and white. “He is mine—mine!”

My brother shook his head and turned from us with his burden.

Janita made another vain effort to rise and follow him. I heard my own voice as at a great distance asking a question the answer to which I felt no one there dared give me. With a cry of supreme grief Janita reeled back into my arms, our eyes met in an agonized recognition of woe, then to Janita came the blessed relief of temporary oblivion.

Our darling boy was dead.

\* \* \* \* \*

A long interval has elapsed since I wrote the last words. Although years have passed since that fatal night, in recalling the past I have paid the penalty by depression of spirit, and am almost loath to finish the story.



For days we despaired of Janita's life, so that when the physicians told me as gently as possible that my sweet young wife would never walk again, the thought of the long years of patient suffering was swallowed up in my thankfulness at her reprieve from death.

It was months before Janita could tell us the details of her adventure when she left my side that night, during the pause between Barney's story of the Axtell house and his second recital.

Janita had fancied she heard Jan cry out to her, before Barney began his second story. She went to her room and found Jan was missing. Startled, but still not seriously alarmed, she then made her way to the servants' hall, losing her way twice through the alterations my aunt had made in the house.

She thought Kate certainly had the child with her, and upon discovering he was not in the servants' hall, she took Kate back with her, and they went through the other rooms thinking Jan might have awakened and was searching for us.

Suddenly, Kate said, Mrs. Willoughby gave a little cry of alarm and said, "I see—I see! he thinks I have forgotten the secret stairway. My child could starve there, and we could never hear his cries. Get me a candle, Kate, say nothing to the others, but come with me as quickly as you can."

Kate obeyed her, and she led the way across the ballroom to the slide at the bottom of the stairway. It was hard work getting it open, and when they had done so, Janita ascended alone.



She gave an exclamation of delight upon finding the babe sleeping peacefully.

She then called Kate to come half-way up the stairs, and take the candle, telling her to descend carefully, and wait for her, since she knew the stairs well. Kate said Janita started down rather swiftly, the child in her arms, when suddenly she made a misstep, gave a low scream, and fell forward; Jan's head struck the lowest step—the purple mark on the delicate temple was the death mark, and our darling never knew a moment's anguish.

Whether it was with the hope of buying me, through the child's recovery; or merely the low tigerish instinct of revenge and torment that urged Barney to carry Jan to the haunted chamber will always remain in doubt. I never saw the man again. Jan was asleep when his mother found him, and he must have been gently moved.

I never asked, nor did any one tell me until years afterward, how Mr. Ralston and Harold met the city authorities and delivered the treasure to their keeping. The jewels were restored to England and their owners after many years, where I trust they may never betray another into temptation and woe.

The money was found to be cleverly counterfeited. Not a coin was true in weight or value. It was as base and false as the motive that assailed me in accepting it from Janita that fatal night.

Barney disappeared, and no effort was made to apprehend him.



My brother was at my side every moment during those weeks of anxiety for Janita, and Susy proved even more than before her claim to our gratitude and love.

Slowly we won my wife from the valley of the shadow, only to realize that her life must continue in the shadow of pain and helplessness. Ah! God—could I but have changed places with her. Patiently, lovingly, she soothed my grief and impatient rebellion against this awful blight upon our happiness, and led me back to higher, better thoughts. Janita, wife, noble woman, to-day as I write the words tears of gratitude rush to my eyes, to you I owe all and everything.

My life is nearly spent now. I look back upon its struggles and temptations, as I see young men growing up about me. Once more I see the worthiest aspirations preparing pitfalls for guileless feet. I see the fall, and the endeavor to expiate the sin, and the suffering as an inevitable consequence.

But on my heart He has written in letters of fire His infinite Wisdom and Mercy, in that out of all I have suffered, all I have deserved of anguish, He has left me the gentle, loving, and now Heavenly memory of Janita.







## APPENDIX.







## HISTORIC MELROSE HALL TO BE SOLD AT AUCTION.

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ERECTED FIFTY YEARS BEFORE AMERICAN REVOLUTION  
—SCENES OF MANY ROMANTIC INCIDENTS.

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A RENDEZVOUS FOR TORIES.

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MANY FANCIFUL STORIES TOLD ABOUT THE OLD PLACE  
AND ITS MANY DIFFERENT OWNERS.

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*March 27, 1901.*

Old Melrose Hall, at Bedford Avenue and Winthrop Street, Flatbush, is to be sold at auction Monday, April 8. Possibly no single dwelling in Greater New York has witnessed more romantic incidents than has Melrose Hall. Its erection ante-dates by many years the American Revolution; it possesses a style of architecture quite unknown to the early Dutch settlers; and on a plan grander and more pretentious than any of its contemporaries.



It is said to have been built by an Englishman by the name of Lane in 1749 and this is proved beyond a doubt by ancient deeds still in existence. There is no house in Flatbush which has had so many different owners as this, and none of which so many fanciful stories have been told. The land upon which it was built was the remaining twenty-eight acres forming part originally of a Vanderbilt farm, and this portion was purchased by the English gentleman. Mr. Lane was a man of good family, who was banished from his home in England on account of the wild life he led. He had married a woman of low parentage and they lived here on an annuity, which ceased at his death; after that she could not support the style in which they had lived and the house was offered for sale and purchased by Colonel Axtell.

The house was, for that age, more than a century and a half ago, a large and showy one; it had a greenhouse in the rear. The cornices in the drawing-rooms were gilded, the rooms wainscoted and the halls wide. Here its proprietor, with his numerous friends, led a merry life.

Colonel William Axtell was the next owner of the property. Axtell was a descendant of Daniel Axtell, a colonel in Cromwell's army, who was beheaded by order of Charles II. It is said that Colonel Axtell built some of the secret closets with which the house abounds, for the concealment of his Tory friends. Being a man of much influence and considerable wealth,



his new home became a favorite rendezvous for all the Tory element in and about the metropolis. Here many a secret conclave was held and many a plan concocted to thwart the designs of the rebels.

In 1778 Axtell was commissioned by Sir William Howe to raise a regiment of foot, of which he was colonel.

In 1776, a few days before the battle of Long Island, while Axtell was entertaining a party of British officers, an American gunner, stationed on the wooded heights beyond, threw a shell into the house, causing much damage and great consternation to the inmates.

For no inconsiderable period of its history Melrose was looked upon suspiciously by its neighbors as a place to be avoided after nightfall, and the children of the neighborhood were awed and silenced by stories of phantom sights and sounds seen and heard in and about the ancient place. The ghosts said to have haunted the house gave no sign as to which family they belonged, but long after the War of the Revolution, it is said, no one liked to venture, after dark, within the haunted premises. They say that human remains, bones, hair, and military buttons have been found on digging upon the premises, but this mystery is spoiled by explaining that it was known that some English soldiers who died during the war were buried here.

Mrs. Axtell, who was said to be a very haughty woman, brought with her to this house a poor, pale, sickly looking child; it was her sister or her niece, who,



they used to say, was always crying with homesickness and longing to go back, but was never allowed to go. She was taken very ill one night and died suddenly.

Above the ballroom was a secret chamber, with no entrance save by a window far up from the ground, where it was later affirmed a young girl had been purposely starved to death, and whose ghost wandered at night about the house. It was doubtless founded upon the innocent death of Mrs. Axtell's little sister.

Another sister lived with the Axtells, and she was of a different world. She was wooed and won by General Giles of the American troops. He was forbidden to enter upon the domain of Colonel Axtell, but the lady met him at the gate, and one day, it is said, they ran away and got married. By strange poetic justice, when the estates of Colonel Axtell were confiscated at the close of the war, they became the property of General Giles, who purchased them in 1784, and the lady who had forbidden the young American officer to enter her doors was now obliged, if she entered at all, to come as his guest. Colonel Axtell died in England in 1795, aged 75.

Thus by the fortunes of war, master and guest changed places, and Colonel Giles and his wife, Eliza, were the happy possessors of Melrose Hall until June 21, 1809, when they conveyed the same to Bateman Lloyd. Lloyd was a native of Salem, N. J., an officer in the American Army, and died at Melrose in 1815.



Through his heirs it finally passed to James Mowitt, husband of the well known actress, who resided here from 1836 to 1841.

Mrs. Anna Cora Mowitt, daughter of S. G. Ogden of New York, in her autobiography speaks of the life in Flatbush most enthusiastically. Here she spent happy years, as she herself writes, trundling hoops, skipping the rope, riding horseback and dressed in half Turkish costume, shooting birds on the wing, much to the annoyance and disgust of her staid Dutch neighbors. She named it Melrose Hall. In 1844 Dr. John Robinson purchased the property and went there to reside with his family. Dr. Robinson was a gentleman of the old school and a graduate of Dublin University. Though his practice was mostly in the City of New York, he took a just pride in Melrose and preserved its rare trees and shrubs with scrupulous care. He resided longer in Melrose than any other person, and gave character by his individuality to the whole place. He died in 1879.

Since his death Melrose Hall and a part of the original domain was purchased by his old friend and neighbor, Dr. Homer L. Bartlett. He moved the ancient mansion about two hundred feet back, so that it now faces on Bedford Avenue, and has removed both the ballroom and secret chamber and the kitchen and slaves' quarters, which were out of repair. Dr. Thomas Stafford Drowne purchased the property as it now stands from Dr. Bartlett, and during his lifetime repaired the house and restored it to its an-



cient appearance in many ways. It is now to be sold to settle his estate.

The house is built of oak with heavy hand-hewn beams, and instead of nails it is pinned with wooden pins. The laths are cedar and the corners dovetailed together. It is as firm to-day as in its earlier glory and would put to shame many a modern house. The floors are foot-wide oak planks, the window casings are hand made, as is all the woodwork, and each window contains twenty-four panes of glass. There are many names and inscriptions on the glass, telling the story of many lives now passed away. There are initials touchingly entwined, and circles drawn about two names, hinting of romances under the ancient roof-tree. On one of the front windows is a very old pane of glass with the following lines:

Why are the bouds of friendship tyed  
With so remiss a knot,  
That by most they are defy'd,  
And by the most forgot.  
Why do we step in so light a sense,  
From friendship to indifference?

There is a staircase that leads nowhere and ends in a blank wall, for there is no head room, and there are many bullet holes in the roof, telling the tale of war through which this old house stood unharmed.

THE END.















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